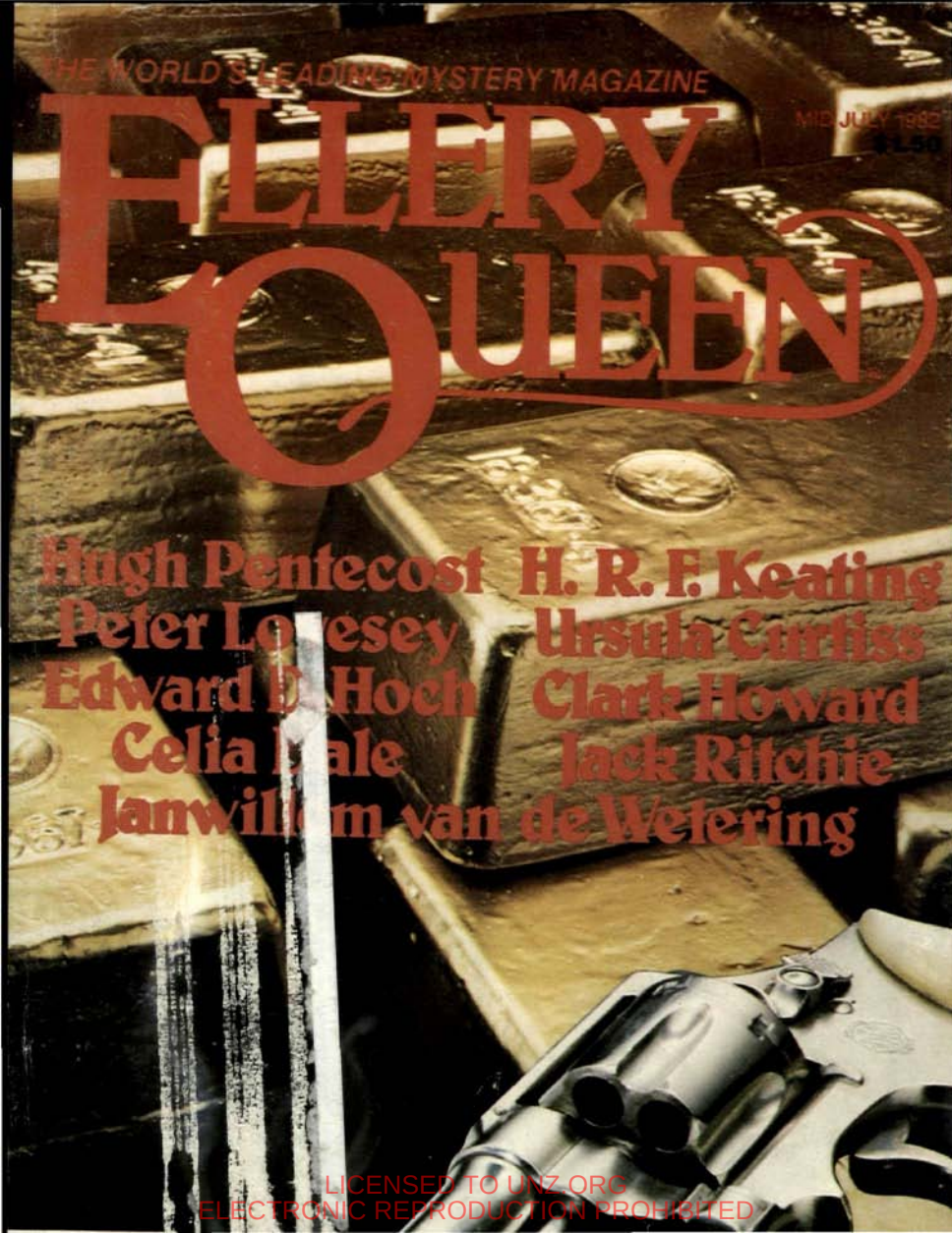

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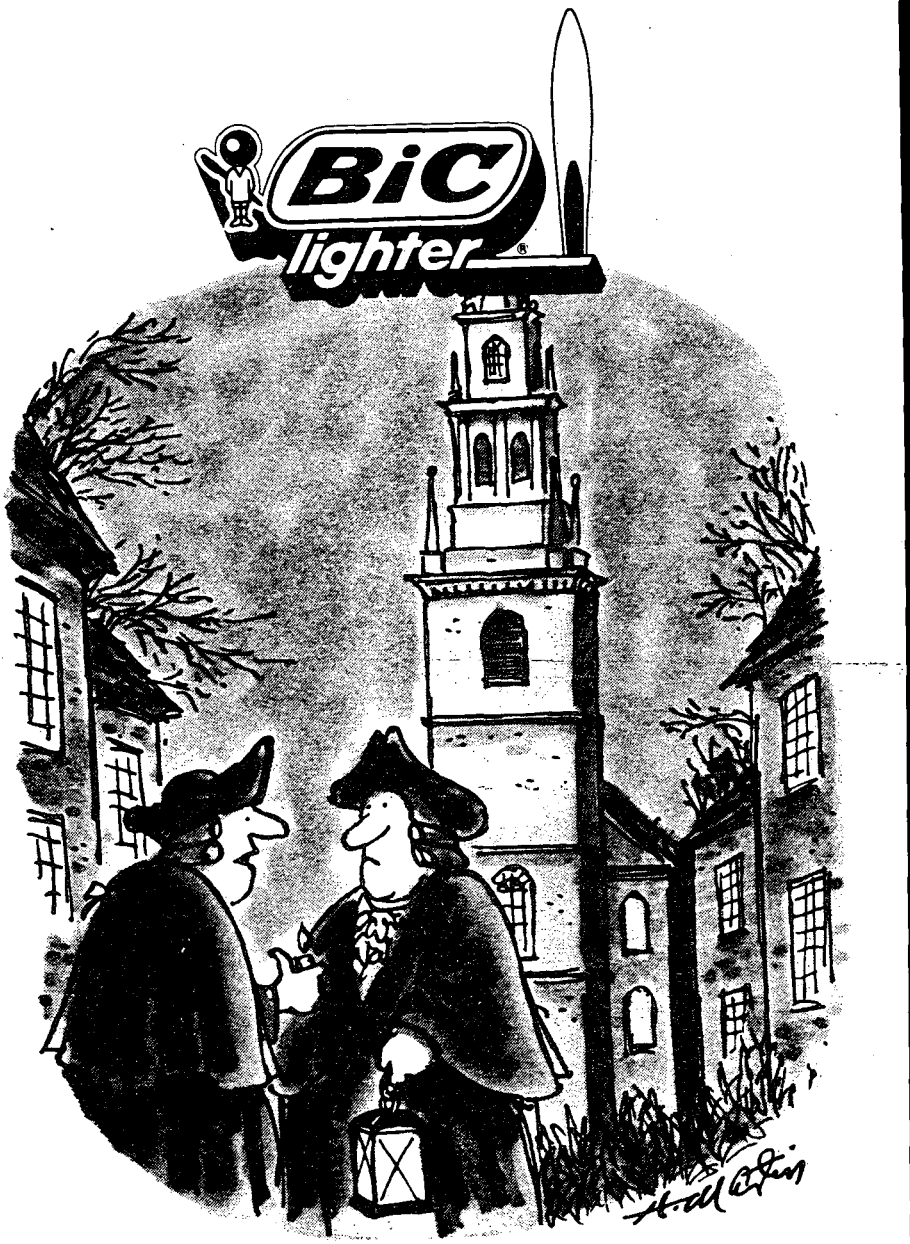

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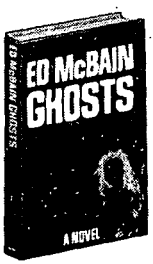

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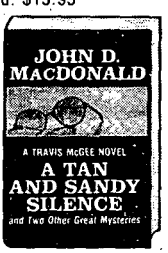

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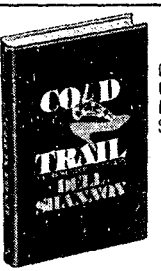

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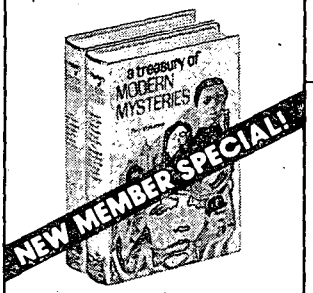

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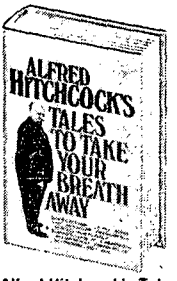

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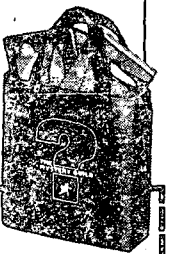

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THE FLYING FIEND

by EDWARD D. HOCH

I've been asked to record another exploit of my friend Sir Gideon Parrot, and it seems to me I must at last reveal certain aspects of the Flying Fiend affair, a case that baffled the best detective minds of two nations.

One of my clients was a large West Coast corporation that maintained a vacation retreat for executives on a small island in the Strait of Georgia, off the northwest coast of Washington State. It was a picturesque region and I'd often wanted to return there after sitting in on a company meeting at the island a few years back. When one of the executives suggested that I might vacation there for a week in August free of charge, I seized the opportunity. I didn't even question him when he suggested I might bring my old friend Sir Gideon Parrot along for the trip.

I'd never been off on vacation with Gideon before but he readily accepted my invitation. We flew across the country to Seattle and hired a boat to take us up through the inlets and straits to the cluster of islands that sat on the American-Canadian border at this point. Some, like San Juan Island, were large enough to have a national historical park. Others, like the company's Cracker Island, were large enough for only a few buildings and a dozen acres of wooded trails.

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"I have to thank you for this," Sir Gideon Parrot said as we stepped ashore on Cracker Island. "We have nothing comparable in Britain, except perhaps the Hebrides off the western coast of Scotland. But the weather there is generally abominable."

"I think it can be pretty bad here too, in the winter months," I said. But this August day was beautiful, with a clear sky showing only the occasional vapor trails of high-flying jets bound across the Pacific.

We were greeted at the Cracker Island dock by Seb Wrankler, a fiftyish man with a gray beard who walked with a little limp and was the company's caretaker on the island. "Hello there," he said, shaking our hands. "This your first visit to Cracker Island?"

I explained that I'd been there previously but hadn't really had a chance to look around. "We're looking forward to a week of peace and quiet."

"Well, you might not get much of that," Wrankler said. "Police boats been around a lot."

"How come?"

"Been some killings on the various islands. Bad for business."

"What sort of killings?" Gideon asked. I could see his curiosity was aroused.

"Madman, most likely. But you got nothing to worry about here, long as you don't go roaming about alone after dark."

"When did all this start?" I asked him. A suspicion was beginning to take shape in the back of my mind.

"Well, the first killing was around the end of June, but it didn't cause much of a stir. They thought it might have been done by a big bird of some sort." As he talked Wrankler picked up our bags and started along the path to the guest cottage.

"A bird?" Gideon was fully piqued now. "How is that possible?"

"The victim was a young man who'd obviously been drinking too much and had fallen asleep on one of the small beaches. There were no footprints but his own leading to the spot. They thought a buzzard might have attacked him, believing he was dead."

"Are there buzzards in these parts?" I asked.

"Oh, we get some turkey vultures up this way in the summer, though not usually over the water. Could have been some big gulls for that matter. The face and head were pretty badly cut up."

"But what actually killed him?"

"Throat was cut."

"By a *bird*?"

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"Well, stranger things have happened. And as I said, this was only the first of the killings."

The guest cottage was nicely decorated with watercolor paintings of the area. There were two big beds, along with a writing desk, a bathroom, and plenty of closet space. All the comforts of home, and not a mention of the corporation that was paying for everything.

"After you get settled in, come over to the main lodge," Seb Wrankler said. "I'll whip you up something to eat."

"He seems friendly enough," I remarked after Gideon and I were alone.

Gideon sniffed. "He'd never replace an English butler, but I suppose he'll do. We'll know better after we sample his food."

As I unpacked and hung my things in the closet I said, "You know something, Gideon, I'll bet they invited us to spend a week up here so you could investigate these local murders. It wouldn't be very good for the corporate reputation to have someone killed while vacationing here. They couldn't hire an official detective and run counter to the police investigation, but they could invite the two of us up here in hopes you could help."

"I doubt if my fame has spread this far," Gideon said, though he well knew that his recent successes had been widely reported in the press.

An hour later, as the sun was dropping low in the western sky, we strolled over to the main lodge. There was a large room with a mixed décor—everything from moose heads to model planes—and scattered tables that could be grouped for dinners and meetings. Wrankler was in the kitchen when we entered and he called out, "Make yourselves comfortable. I'm just getting supper."

Over plates of tastily prepared salmon from local waters, I asked Wrankler for more information about the local killings. "What happened after the first one?"

"Well, it all died down in a couple of weeks, as those things will. But then around the middle of July a young woman sunbather was killed in the same manner, just before dark. She was camping with her husband at one of the state parks—there are several on these islands—and suddenly he heard her screams from the beach area. He ran there and found her face cut up and her throat cut, just like the first one. There was no one else in sight and no other footprints but the victim's own."

"Did he see any birds?"

"Oh, they asked him that. There were a few gulls and some boats,

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but nothing close by. They talked to some bird expert at the university, you know, and he said it would have to be a bird with a very strong, sharp beak—like a parrot, I guess. But I suppose you know all about them, Mr. Parrot."

Gideon bristled, as he always did when his name was pronounced that way. "The *t* is silent, the accent is on the *o*."

"That sounds French. I thought you were English."

"William the Conqueror was both," Gideon pointed out, bringing a puzzled frown and silence from Wrankler.

"How many killings have there been so far?" I asked.

"Three. The last one was two weeks ago, on one of the Canadian islands about ten miles from here. Same thing. A man alone on the beach, this time at night again, attacked and killed. No witnesses, no footprints but the man's. The Canadian police have been working with our people ever since, but they've turned up no leads."

"What were the names of the victims?" Gideon asked.

"Is that important?" I wanted to know.

"It could be. There was a famous serial murder in Britain some time back in which the killer followed the letters of the alphabet—A, B, C."

Seb Wrankler went into his little office and returned with a bunch of newspaper clippings. I flipped quickly through them, calling out the names and other information. "First victim was Ross Farley, age 24, of Seattle. That was on June 28th. Then on July 14th, Mari Quinn, 29, of Portland, Oregon. And on July 25th, Pierre King, age 47, of Vancouver, Canada."

"No obvious connections there," Gideon admitted. "And the dates don't correspond to the full moon or anything else I can think of." He went back to his dinner.

"This salmon is awfully good," I said, finishing the last of it. "You catch it yourself?"

Wrankler nodded. "I go out in the boat, catch what I can. The corporation is generous with money, but every little bit helps."

"It must get lonely here."

"No. Most weeks someone's around. And I can always go over to one of the other islands."

We were cleaning up after dinner, talking about plans for the following day, which were to include a boat tour around the islands, when we heard a pounding on the door. Seb rose to answer it, looking concerned.

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A woman stumbled in. She was dressed in jeans and a faded blouse. "Hel—help me," she stammered. "My husband's been killed!"

I was on my feet at once. "What happened?"

She was dazed with shock, barely able to speak. "Over on Cabot Island—"

"That's the next one," Seb told us.

"Something killed him on the shore. Just like those others!"

"You've got to show us where," Seb Wrankler said, taking her by the arms. "Did you call the police? The Coast Guard patrol?"

She shook her head. "No telephone or radio. We're staying at a friend's cottage and the phone is disconnected."

"Let's start across in my boat," Wrankler said. "I'll radio the Coast Guard on the way."

It was dark now and a breeze had come up over the water. We climbed aboard Wrankler's cabin cruiser and started across about a mile of open water, leaving the woman's little outboard beached on our shore. She was regaining her composure and told us her name was Maeva Armstrong. Her husband Frank, a Seattle engineer, had brought her along for a few days of fishing and camping. He'd gone out after supper to relax on the narrow strip of beach and when he didn't return, she went looking for him and found him dead.

Even in the darkness we had no trouble locating the body. After finding him dead, Maeva Armstrong had got a flare from the tent and lit it, hoping to attract help. When none came, she'd taken the boat across the water to Cracker Island. But the flare still sputtered and burned next to the body, bathing it in a bright orange glow. Wrankler maneuvered his craft into the shallow water near the flare and tossed an anchor to the shore. We waded the last few feet through the cool shallow water.

Frank Armstrong lay on his back by the flare, his face and throat cut by some sharp instrument. I tried to imagine a bird's claws or beak doing such damage. It seemed possible but highly unlikely. Wrankler had radioed for help on the way across, and we saw the lights of the Coast Guard craft already turning in toward shore.

"Are these your footprints?" Gideon asked the woman.

She nodded, turning away from the body. The only prints were those of the dead man, and then the single track of her sandals coming up to the body, pausing, and running over to where the boat had been beached. "The killer certainly didn't come by foot," I said, stating the obvious.

Gideon bent to pick up something from the sand. "This was by his

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hand," he said, holding up a little card not much larger than a business card. On it were printed the words *The Flying Friend.*

A jagged line of blue ink had been drawn through the *r* in *Friend,* so that the card now read *The Flying Fiend.*

It was one of the Coast Guardsmen who immediately identified the strange calling card. "*The Flying Friend.* That's the Reverend Horace Black, an ordained minister who travels around the islands in a helicopter. He's forever giving away Bibles with this calling card stuck in them."

Gideon Parrot grunted and continued studying the card. "Was anything like this found with the other bodies?"

The Coast Guardsmen shook their heads. No one knew anything about it. "You might talk to Sergeant Monticello," Wrankler suggested. "He's coordinating the investigation for the various jurisdictions involved."

I could see that Gideon was hooked. Whether by intention or not, the corporation had invited the very person most likely to get to the bottom of these killings. In the morning, all thoughts of a leisurely week in the sun put aside for the moment, Gideon and I found ourselves in the office of Sergeant Monticello of the Bellingham police. He was a deep-voiced man with a barrel chest and big hands. He kept moving a glass paperweight around his desk nervously as he spoke.

"You realize only the first of the killings—that of Ross Farley—took place in my jurisdiction," he told us. "The county lines and national boundaries are a bit confusing out there among the islands, so for the time being I'm coordinating everything. If these killings keep up, though, somebody with higher rank will probably get the assignment. That's the way it usually goes." His flat voice carried just a trace of bitterness toward the system.

I explained how we'd happened on the body of the latest victim the previous evening, and described the card Gideon had found near the victim's hand. Sergeant Monticello nodded, picking up a typed report from his desk. "It was all here waiting for me this morning. This is the first instance where a card or signature of any sort has been left on the scene. It could mean our killer is getting more sure of himself, or a little crazier. In either case it means more murders to come. There'd be no point in leaving that card if this was to be the last of the killings."

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"Do you know anything about the Reverend Horace Black?" Gideon asked.

"Oh, he's a bit of a kook, flying around in his helicopter, but he's certainly no murderer. Everyone in these parts knows him."

"I'd like to meet him," Gideon said. "Ask a few questions."

Sergeant Monticello sighed. "I know you've got quite a reputation in London and New York, Sir Gideon, but you might be out of your territory a bit here. These aren't any big-city killings, and you can't use big-city techniques to go after the murderer."

"I could hardly be accused of using big-city techniques," Gideon answered with a slight smile. "I merely want to ask the man a few questions. He may be above suspicion as a mass murderer, but the fact remains he possesses a helicopter—and we're looking for a killer who seems to drop out of the skies."

Monticello dismissed us with a wave of his hand. "Go. Talk to him if you want. Come back and see me when you've got the murderer."

Horace Black was not a hard man to find. We learned that his church, a vaguely defined Protestant denomination, was located on the largest of the area's islands, at a place called Oak Harbor. It was connected to the mainland by a bridge, and when we arrived there by rented car we saw the helicopter just settling down for a landing behind the church itself.

Gideon Parrot got out of the car and strode forward like some official greeter, welcoming Black back to his own church. The minister, wearing aviator's goggles more suited to a World War I biplane, looked very little like a man of God, but he accepted Gideon's welcome with good humor. "All are welcome at my church," he said, smoothing down his long sandy hair. He was younger than I'd expected, probably still in his early thirties, with a thin mustache that heightened the sense of someone from a past era.

We followed him inside where he quickly picked two books from a shelf and handed them to us. They were Bibles bound in imitation leather and probably costing no more than a couple of dollars apiece—the sort one found in hotel-room drawers. Inside the front cover of each was a printed card reading *The Flying Friend.*

"Now what can I do for you?" Horace Black asked, sitting behind a desk piled high with unopened mail and assorted literature. "Interested in our Bible class?"

"We came about the murders," Gideon responded. "I'm investigating them on an unofficial basis."

"Oh, yes. I've already been in touch with Sergeant Monticello

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about it. I understand one of my cards was found by the latest victim."

"That's correct. The word *friend* had been changed to—"

"*Fiend.* The killer is not without humor, despite his godless depravity. Of course I leave the cards everywhere on these islands. It's like my parish, in a sense."

"Were you recently on Cabot Island?" Gideon asked.

"Yes, I'm sure I was."

"The victim's wife was not familiar with you."

"Well, these summer people come and go. I may have visited the island's previous residents and left a Bible for them."

Gideon seemed to study the man for a moment and then said, "Of course there remains the possibility that the killer didn't leave that calling card, that the dying man struck out the letter *r* himself to indicate his killer."

"You are accusing me of murder?" The thought seemed to amuse the minister.

"Not at all. Just examining the possibilities."

"Sergeant Monticello already examined the same possibilities. He tells me the dead man had no pen or pencil on him. He could not have altered that card before he died."

"Then I guess I've been wasting your time," Gideon admitted.

"Not at all." Black was gracious now. "Look, I have to fly over to Glover Island. Come along with me, you two, and I'll show you a view of these islands you'll never see from the ground."

It was an offer we couldn't resist. We followed him out to the cabin of his helicopter and climbed inside. Though there were four seats we seemed a bit cramped, and when Black took off straight up, I lurched into Gideon, thrown off balance as in a suddenly rising elevator that stops and then starts again.

It was nearly noon, and the sun bathed the entire area in a soft unreal glow. The waters of the straits were unusually calm, and their mirrored surface resembled the glass in some child's diorama from this far up. Horace Black talked without stopping, pointing out and naming the various islands as we passed over them. He showed us the scenes of each of the four killings, swooping low over the rocky beaches to pinpoint these and other spots of interest.

We settled down on Glover Island and watched while he delivered a carton of Bibles to a colony of summer cottages. Then we were off and flying again. "We keep hearing there could be oil under these waters," Black told us as we glided in low over the straits. "But I

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guess you hear that all up and down the west coast these days. Be a shame to ruin all this beauty with a bunch of oil rigs." He turned to look at Gideon. "That's something I could kill for, to keep God's land as he intended."

"I doubt if our Flying Fiend has quite such noble motives."

"Of course there's always drugs."

I saw Gideon perk up. "Drugs?"

"Sure. A lot of it comes in from Canada this way. Cocaine, heroin, pot—you name it. I see it all the time when I work with younger people."

"Could the killings be drug-related?"

"None of the victims have been regular island residents. And you read in the papers what goes on every day in Miami. Any time there's a rash of killings along the fringes of the country you have to consider the possibility of drug traffic. I told that to Monticello."

"What did he say?"

"Just that he's looking into all possibilities."

We came in over Black's church and dropped gently onto his landing field. It had been a pleasant scenic flight, even if it hadn't gained us any new facts about the murders. We said goodbye to the Reverend Horace Black and drove back to the mainland.

"What do you think about his narcotics theory?" I asked Gideon.

"I think that a hollowed-out Bible would be a perfect way to deliver drugs without anybody noticing."

We went back to the corporation's island and tried to relax. There were no clues to the Flying Fiend except the card left with the latest victim, and that seemed to be a dead end at the moment. Seb Wrankler had one of the minister's Bibles in the main lodge, but it certainly wasn't hollowed-out.

"Oh, the minister's all right," Wrankler conceded. "I'm not a religious man myself, but I don't mind him setting his helicopter down for a visit now and then. Sometimes when I'm all alone here I'm downright glad to see him."

"That helicopter seemed pretty noisy," Gideon remarked.

"Oh, sure. When he comes to call, you know it."

Toward evening Gideon managed to reach Maeva Armstrong at the funeral home where preparations were being made for her husband's service. I heard him say, "I hate to bother you at a time like this, Mrs. Armstrong, but I have just one question to ask you. It might help the investigation. Shortly before you found your hus-

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band's body, did you hear any loud noise in the sky—the sort of pulsating noise that a helicopter makes? You didn't? You heard nothing at all?"

After a bit more conversation Gideon hung up and turned to me. "She heard nothing, and I doubt if anyone else did. If the killer is using a helicopter he must have some sort of silencing device for it."

"Is such a thing possible?"

"Not that I know of."

Wrankler was pouring our after-dinner coffee. "Maybe the killer comes in on a hang glider, towed behind a boat."

"Or in a scuba diving gear from under the water," I suggested, entering into the spirit of the thing.

"A hang glider would pass too quickly over the victims," Gideon answered seriously. "And a scuba diver would have left footprints between the water and his victims."

Our after-dinner conversation was getting us nowhere, so we soon abandoned it. The fresh salt air had tired both Gideon and myself and we retired soon thereafter, sleeping soundly through the night.

In the morning when we awakened, the sun was already high among the treetops. It was after nine o'clock, and as we made our way sleepily to a belated breakfast at the main lodge Seb Wrankler met us with news of another murder.

The victim this time was an elderly man who'd fallen asleep while fishing off a pier on one of the larger islands. The killing had occurred soon after darkness fell, but there were witnesses to swear that no one had gone out on the pier until a couple of them walked out together to waken the elderly man and found the usual fatal wounds around his face and throat. There was no calling card from the Flying Fiend this time, or if there was perhaps it had fallen into the water or blown away. The dead man's name was Herbert Thompson and he was 67 years old.

"Always near the water," Gideon mused. "As if it was a swimming fiend rather than a flying one."

"This is two nights in a row. What do you think it means?"

He didn't answer, but after breakfast he went to the telephone and managed to reach Sergeant Monticello at his office. They talked for a long time, very quietly, but when he rejoined Wrankler and me at the table he seemed dejected.

"No new leads," he told us. "It seems hopeless."

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"Didn't you ever have anything like this back in London?" I asked him. "Jack the Ripper and that sort of thing?"

"I'm not old enough to remember Jack the Ripper," he answered dryly. "But I do have one idea I'd like to try out on you. It involves something Horace Black told us about there being oil under these waters."

Seb Wrankler snorted. "You believe that old story? The only oil there'll be around here is if the pipeline springs a leak."

"Still," Gideon said, "I think it's worth looking into."

We spent the day exploring the island, with Gideon concentrating especially on the area near the water's edge. I couldn't imagine what he was up to. Finally, in late afternoon, he told me, "I want you to go back to the lodge now. I'm going to stay out here alone."

"Won't it be dangerous after dark? The killer—"

"Exactly! I'm setting myself up as a target and I expect the killer to come after me. Here's what I want you to do. Go back to the lodge for supper as usual and tell Seb I've got a clue and I stayed down by the water. Then, after supper, leave him and go back to our cabin alone. Tell him you're going to lie down. But whatever you do, don't drink any of the coffee."

"The coffee?"

"We were drugged last night."

"You mean that Seb—?"

"No time for talk now—do as I say. I want you to sneak out later and try to follow Seb when he leaves the lodge."

Then he was gone, moving away from me down the shoreline. I felt bewildered and a little frightened, but I did what he asked me. Under the circumstances I found it difficult to converse with Seb Wrankler, and I may have been too obvious when I declined his offer of coffee. But later I acted properly drowsy and told him I was turning in early. Maybe he'd decide the drugged coffee hadn't been needed.

I waited in our cabin for about ten minutes and then made my way through the woods to the back of the main lodge. After an uncomfortable half hour squatting behind a bush, my vigil was rewarded. Seb Wrankler came out carrying a large cardboard box carefully in both hands.

I followed him through the woods, staying under cover at all times. It was dusk now, but I could still see him as he reached the dock and went aboard the boat with his strange cargo. Gideon was nowhere in sight, and I assumed he was still on the other side of the island. After a few moments Wrankler started the boat's inboard

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motor and pulled away from the dock. Before long the darkness would make it impossible to see anything but the boat's running lights.

Quickly I crossed the island, seeking the area where I'd left Gideon. He was still there, sitting on the sand, staring out at the darkness which was quickly enveloping the water. I wanted to run to him and warn him, but I hung back, hidden at the edge of the trees. I thought I heard the noise of an approaching boat, but it died as quickly as it had begun.

So I waited.

After about five minutes I was impatient to tell him of my presence. I was about to yell something when I heard a low humming sound in the sky above the beach. It grew louder but not too loud, and Gideon appeared not to notice.

And then I saw it—a great winged creature circling about ten feet over Gideon's head.

I broke from the trees, unable to restrain myself any longer. But even as I ran out onto the beach, the creature dove and came in straight for Gideon's face. He started to rise, seeing it at last, but the thing was almost upon him.

Then a sudden single shot rang out and the creature seemed to come apart in midair. There were shouts from the water and two more shots.

"Gideon! Are you all right?" I asked as I reached him.

"I think so. It was a close call."

A Coast Guard boat came into view, and I recognized Sergeant Monticello standing in the bow with a high-powered rifle in his hands. "We got him!" he shouted to Gideon. "He went for a gun and we had to kill him."

I looked back at Gideon. "Wrankler?"

He nodded and walked to the water's edge where the thing I'd taken for a creature lay smashed in the shallow water. It was one of the model airplanes from the lodge. "That was the murder weapon?" I asked in disbelief.

Gideon Parrot nodded. "The Flying Fiend will fly no more."

Later, back at the lodge, with Monticello and me as an avid audience, Gideon explained. "Wrankler used model airplanes with propellers sharpened to razor-thin edges. They were guided from his boat by a thin, almost invisible wire. The killings usually took place around dusk or shortly after dark, when he could still see his victims

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but the small model planes were almost invisible. He could guide them quite accurately with the wire, and he chose victims who were dozing or otherwise off-guard. Before they knew what hit them those razor-sharp propeller blades were slicing up their face and throat. If the plane was damaged after the attack and unable to fly back to the boat, Wrankler could jerk on the wire, flip the plane into the water, and pull it back on board. There'd be no trace on the hard wet sand between the body and the water."

"But what was his motive?" Sergeant Monticello asked.

"I suspect it was oil. Some other corporation—other than the one that employed him—wanted to drill for oil on these islands. They secretly hired Seb Wrankler to scare people away and make the area unpopular, so there'd be less opposition to their buying mineral rights to the islands. I mentioned oil to him today, figuring if that was the motive he'd probably mark me as the next victim just to get rid of me."

Gideon got to his feet. "Meanwhile, Sergeant, we'll be getting a good night's sleep and heading back in the morning." He paused at the door. "You were here right on schedule after our telephone conversation this morning. I believe I asked you something else too."

"About Frank Armstrong's funeral. It's tomorrow morning at ten."

Gideon nodded. "We'll want to stop there on our way to the airport."

"What for?" I asked.

"Simply to pay our respects to one of the victims."

By morning the newspapers had the story of the Flying Fiend's demise and were speculating as to the motive behind the series of bizarre crimes. As he drove us to Frank Armstrong's funeral, Monticello told us he'd discovered monthly payments to Wrankler by an oil company. "It's only a matter of time before we put it all together."

Gideon waited until after the funeral to approach Mrs. Armstrong. She recognized him at once and hurried over to thank him. "You're the man who exposed the Flying Fiend, aren't you? I don't know how to thank you for avenging my husband."

"He hasn't yet been avenged," Gideon said sadly. "Your husband was not one of the victims of Seb Wrankler and his fiendish device."

"What do you mean?"

"None of the other bodies had the Flying Fiend calling card, only your husband's. That was because the killer's murder device, a model plane, could not deliver and drop such a card. It was important in

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your husband's murder, though, because you wanted to direct our attention toward the sky and away from the ground—which is the route by which his killer really approached."

"Are you accusing me—?"

"It was a copycat killing, something the police often encounter in serial murders. You killed your husband as he dozed on the sand, probably using a razor to make it look like the other murders. And you left that card so we'd look for an airborne killer."

"I hope you can prove these charges, because I'll sue you for every—"

"Oh, I can prove them, Mrs. Armstrong. You told us you got a flare from the tent after finding your husband's body, and lit it to summon help. The flare was by the body, all right, but there was only one set of your footprints to the body and then to the boat. You never went back for the flare, which means you had it with you all the time. And you had it with you because you knew you'd be needing it when you walked up to your husband with that razor."

Her body seemed to sag then, as she turned to look at our faces all around her. "And this is Sergeant Monticello," Gideon continued. "I'm sure you remember him, Mrs. Armstrong."

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

NURSERY RHYME (1980s VERSION)

by G. STERLING LEIBY

Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard
To fetch her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there
She cried, "I declare,
It seems that the cupboard is gone!"

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a *NEW* short story by

URSULA CURTISS

Millionaires' Row was not the sort of neighborhood in which you'd expect a series of house robberies; but Deputy Sheriff Richard "Dick" Tracy, with his comic-book jaw and all-purpose wristwatch, was just the man to take charge . . . . .

A BENEFICIAL WALK

by URSULA CURTISS

By March, two months into their regime of a daily constitutional in all weathers, the non-social Morrisroes had discovered themselves to be the apple of everyone's eye.

Was it because simple walking, as opposed to running or jogging, had become something of a lost art in the Southwest? Was it their ages, Blake's sixty and Lucy's fifty-two? Or, in an uneasy world, did such an activity speak of sensible discipline, marital accord, almost of a salute to the flag?

Whatever the reason, their heads-up, shoulders-back energy—they covered a mile and a half in a respectable twenty-seven minutes—came to be greeted by waves and friendly taps of the horn from the other regulars on their various routes, starting at eleven thirty: mailman, deputy sheriff on his patrol, school-bus driver, amiable strangers driving forth on punctual errands. It was as if, in undertaking the walks to give a definite shape to the day since Blake's retirement, the Morrisroes were bestowing a good upon the community.

"I believe we could run for office," said Lucy.

There was about them none of the subtle physical resemblance which sometimes creeps over the long-married. Blake, tall and spare, clipped as to features, had once, on a trip to California, been mistaken for David Niven. Small blue-eyed Lucy, delicate-skinned even

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in this climate, blonde hair now tinted fawn, could have slipped into any fashionable woman's club meeting without further credentials.

Although she looked as if she would be more at home among the teacups, it was she who poured the large sherries with which they rewarded themselves faithfully as soon as they were out of their gloves and coats. Next, she spent a few minutes writing busily in her journal.

It was a habit acquired years ago, and invaluable when it came to settling small debates as to what had happened when. At this time of day Lucy chronicled, among other things, meadowlarks and boat-tailed grackles, encounters with people, adventures with dogs. At first, because pedestrians were relatively unknown here and dogs responded accordingly, Blake had had to do a lot of stick-flourishing, but gradually their shapes and footsteps and voices grew to be known and accepted. There was tail-wagging, and, midway through their round-the-block walk, grave escort as far as the corner by a huge shaggy brown animal, undoubted king of his street.

Deputy Sheriff Richard "Dick" Tracy—his parents were responsible for his Christian name with its inevitable shortening and genes for his earnest jaw, but his outlandish and mirth-provoking wristwatch could be laid at his own door—Dick was ignorant of the journal's existence, but he saluted the Morrisroes almost daily. On an April morning of such blasting wind that along with a headscarf Lucy was wearing sunglasses as a protection against stinging sand and dust, he cruised after them as they re-entered their driveway at three minutes of twelve.

"Have to hand it to you folks, day like this," he said, shooting out his arm and grasping the top of the patrol car for full display of the watch which could do everything but play the piano. "Say, you didn't happen to notice anything funny going on at the Schuyler place yesterday, did you?"

The Schuyler domicile, situated on a winding stretch of road known locally and inaccurately as Millionaires' Row, was white, imposingly two-storied, and wrought-iron-balconied under its Spanish tile roof.

"They were having their rugs steam-cleaned," said Lucy with promptness. "At least that's what the van turning out—" She stopped short.

"Getting cleaned out, more likely," said Deputy Sheriff Tracy, pointing his jaw importantly. "Coin collection, most of it gold, and

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jewelry." He switched off his chattering radio and climbed out of the patrol car. "Got a minute?"

In the Morrisroes' living room, which had the warmth and slight shabbiness of well-rubbed velvet, he refused sherry and eyed their cigarettes as if he had discovered a pair of worms in a peach with a wholesome outer bloom. "You saw the van about when, would you say?"

"Eleven forty or so," said Blake, "because we go as far as the Arabian horse place just beyond there."

"Make?"

They couldn't help him with that, nor had they seen the license plate, which they would not have paid attention to in any case, because they were walking south and the van had turned north, but it had been white with either very dark blue or black lettering, "Carpet Steam-Cleaning" on the side.

"We should have known right then, I suppose," said Lucy, casting a glance at Blake. "No company name, no telephone number? Wait a second . . ."

She plucked her journal from the bookcase, turned pages, read, presently reported with a shake of her head, " 'Cleaning van at Schuylers!' Not much help, but somehow you don't think of a thing like that going on in broad daylight."

Deputy Tracy conceded reluctantly that the van might have been legitimate, a one-man, door-to-door operation, since the robbery could have taken place at any time between eleven o'clock, when the Schuylers had departed for a week in Mexico, and nine this morning, when Mr. Schuyler's sister had arrived from Santa Fe to take charge during their absence. They had relied on their German shepherd, and the boy who came to feed it in mid-afternoon, for the interim.

"With a gold-coin collection?" said Lucy disbelievingly.

"Well, they have timed lights and they left their other Cadillac pulled up in front, but you'd be surprised," Tracy told her absent-mindedly. A smile was beginning to steal over his face, firm and rosy although he wasn't far from retirement himself. "I guess you folks are friends with every dog for miles around by now."

Blake, who had lifted his glass, set it down with sharpness. "I find that a very offensive remark, officer."

Tracy raised a placating palm. "Kidding, kidding."

"I don't know that you are," said Blake, coming to his feet. "My wife and I explore the neighborhood regularly, we are in a position

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to see people making trip preparations, we are familiar with the local dogs. Inspect the premises, if you will be so kind, for a coin collection and jewelry."

"Mr. Morrisroe, Mrs. Morrisroe—"

"I mean it," said Blake between his teeth.

It wasn't a big house and it didn't take long. The Morrisroes' daughter and only child, Maria, made periodic descents in her Triumph Spitfire from her new job and apartment in Denver, collecting the belongings she had stored in the parental home for years, so that the closet in the second bedroom was empty and the bureau nearly so. That left only a bath and a half—grimly, Blake removed the covers of the toilet tanks—the dining room, larger bedroom, and kitchen.

Tracy's neck was scarlet by the time Blake had up-ended Lucy's jewel box on the coverlet of the double bed, yanked open every drawer, whipped the sliding closet doors along their runners.

"Take your time, we'll finish our sherry if you don't mind. Of course, you haven't looked up the chimney and there are always my wife's flower borders, although I warn you that you'll never hear the end of it if you harm her daffodils and hyacinths. And how about the orchard? *There's* a hiding place for you."

"Blake," said Lucy mildly, "don't needle this nice man who is only doing the job you foisted on him."

"I thank you," said Tracy with heavy dignity, and at the door five minutes later, hand extended, "No hard feelings?"

"Would you expect them to be soft?" inquired Blake.

Tracy laughed appreciatively, as if a joke had been made, and reverted to officialdom with a glance at his watch. And some drastic error was showing up in one of its host of tiny windows, because he brought his wrist closer with wounded incredulity. Then, realizing himself to be in the presence of two suspiciously poker faces, he said stiffly, "Had no idea it was this late," and settled his cap squarely and departed.

Ten days later a second break-in took place a half mile from the Schuylers', and although here there was a methodical looping and festooning of toilet paper and most of a bottle of Scotch had been decanted on the living-room rug, the police were convinced that the same perpetrator, perhaps with a lookout, had simply added some embroidery with intent to confuse.

For one thing, each house was set well back on approximately two

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acres, with access from the broad bank of an irrigation ditch behind. For another, television sets and expensive hunting rifles had again been ignored in favor of jewelry, both men's and women's—a wafer-thin platinum pocket watch valued at $5,000 was among the spoils—and some antique silver.

As the robbery rate was very low in this generally well-protected area, an indignation meeting was held in the village hall. The Morrisroes attended, and spoke up in defense of the sheriff's department, which was being muttered at; they suggested that people who informed the newspapers when they were going to attend a black-tie dinner at the country club for patrons of the theater were asking for trouble unless they arranged for a house-sitter.

It was true, and it also followed that the woman in question would wear her second-best jewelry to the dinner; she would save the real dazzle for the next evening, the opening night of the new season.

Officer Tracy did not pay a second call on the Morrisroes in the hope of any chance witnessing because the robbery had taken place between six thirty and midnight. Even apart from that, a downpour which was the fringe of a late-spring blizzard in Colorado, incidentally keeping Maria from a scheduled visit home, would have daunted the bravest walkers.

Nor was the rain the help it should have been, softening the sandy bank for footprints or other tracks. The new and dinner-partying victims, having dropped earrings and necklace and bracelet and cufflinks sleepily into a drawer of the dressing table in their bath, did not discover their loss until mid-morning. By that time early Saturday riders had been out, leaving the bank a churned welter of hoofmarks.

The storm system passed, and Blake and Lucy resumed their brisk perambulations. It only registered on the third day that they had not been lightly honked at by the familiar figure in the police cruiser. A sensible juggling of timetables, because after a period of months a predictable patrol lost a good part of its usefulness? Or re-assignment of Officer Tracy as a mark of official displeasure? The Morrisroes, who had attended the indignation meeting largely in his defense—they considered him an excellent man for the job—sincerely hoped not.

The steam-cleaning van they had described as leaving the first scene was unfindable in spite of newspaper and television publicity. In an age of spray paint it wasn't surprising. For that matter, everyone said wisely, the lettering could have been decals.

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On Thursday night Maria called from Denver to say that she would be driving down for the weekend. Late on Friday afternoon, with her bedroom readied and a celebratory bottle of Piper-Heidseick chilling, Blake and Lucy sauntered out to the orchard so mockingly put forward to Officer Tracy.

There, the deep tangle of grass around one particular apple tree was just that. No dark-green vinyl trash bag remained, its contents not fertilizer or garden waste but a glowing, sparkling, shimmering hoard. The sole trace of vanished treasure was a rounded oblong of yellowing stems, their tops brushed so neatly upright that from a window view the Morrisroe secret was intact.

It was now cruelly clear where the deputy sheriff had been when they missed him on their recent walks: coming relentlessly back once he was sure they were well away from the house, aware, as apparently dense people can be, that he had been baited and laughed at. He wouldn't have dug up Lucy's flower borders, leaving disturbed earth behind him, but the mention of the orchard had set off a slow and cumbrous train of thought.

The house itself was one thing; the outdoors another. In the unlikely event of premature discovery the Morrisroes could say in amazement that someone local had obviously taken note of their walking schedule and seized upon their orchard with its long grass as a safe cache until disposition could be made of the diamonds and emeralds and sapphires, the platinum and coin collection and antique silver.

The Morrisroes had been augmenting their income in various ways for years, Blake so deft with his fingers that few locks resisted him and Lucy listening quick-wittedly to other women when she had her hair tinted. The confidences to be heard were astonishing, such as the date and length of the Schuylers' trip to Mexico.

That foray had been a trifle dangerous, even though the German shepherd had been almost pathetically glad to see them, but well worth it. All at once, however, there was a new complexion on things.

What if the police should find out that these orchard-owners had been interrogated and reluctantly let go for lack of proof in Westport, Connecticut, in Larchmont, New York, in Tucson, Arizona? Those had been peccadillos compared to the confiscated haul.

Blake and Lucy rushed into the house and switched on the local news. Not a word was said about approximately $175,000 in missing valuables.

There couldn't be two interpretations of that. Tracy, of custom

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called Dick, with his comic-strip jaw and his ludicrous watch, would plod into retirement with their riskily garnered gains. And there wasn't a single thing the Morrisroes could do about it.

If there had been no storm the previous weekend, if Maria had been able to make her intended visit . . . but Maria, beguilingly pony-tailed and looking much younger than her actual twenty-eight, would now make the run from Denver for nothing. Her reliable contact in California would rub his anticipatory palms in vain, because this particular scoop was going to come up empty.

When the first shock wave had passed, the Morrisroes contemplated each other with resignation. At least, they reminded themselves over a powerful martini, they had their health.

A small silence fell, while Lucy gazed out at tearing wind and rolling tumbleweeds. "Palm Springs sounds nice," she said presently. "But wouldn't it be a trifle hot for walking?"

"Q"

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a *NEW* Grijpstra-de Gier story story by

JANWILLEM van de Wetering

It has been three years since we brought you a story featuring Janwillem van de Wetering's Grijpstra (Kchr-eh-ihp-strah) and de Gier (duh Kchreer) of Amsterdam's Criminal Investigation Department. Adjutant Grijpstra is a kindly fellow. He married badly and lives an unhappy life, but if you don't raise your voice and keep pushing, he'll open up. Sergeant de Gier is often called "the movie star" because of his good looks. "He is," says Janwillem van de Wetering, "what I would have liked to be like when I was a cop." Which he was, in Amsterdam, in the Sixties.

Now let the author tell you about the circumstances that brought a little old guy named Willems to a home for the elderly disturbed . . .

THE MACHINE GUN AND THE MANNEQUIN

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

He sat on the porch in a cane chair dating back to the time the mansion was built, back in the days when the rich still owned plantations in the colonies. He was a little sickly-looking guy, smoking a cigar. The cigar didn't function too well either—he had to press the torn leaf on the side to suck smoke out of it.

He wasn't a plantation owner, of course, just another nut, and I was on my way out and ready to walk by him. The mansion was now a home for the elderly disturbed and I had been visiting my aunt who isn't right in the head. One must be thoughtful once in a while and that's why I was there, but I had been thoughtful enough

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and wanted to go home. My aunt hasn't a thought in her head any more—she only clicks her dentures and doesn't know what's what.

The little old guy waved at me and pointed at another cane chair that was ready to fall apart. I sat down. He was all alone on the porch and maybe he had something to say. He looked nutty, all right, with his few long hairs waving around his shiny skull. There were buttons missing on his shirt and his slippers had just about frayed off their soles. The bridge of his spectacles bit into his bony nose and his black raisin eyes stared at me over the round glasses.

"No visitors for you, today?" I asked. He wasn't saying anything yet so I might as well be polite.

"Never have any." It wasn't a complaint, just a statement that loosened more words. "Don't know anyone, except the woman who used to clean my place. She'll be cleaning for the next guy now, don't you think?"

I nodded. He was there for keeps.

"Yep," the little old guy said. "Willems is my name, but here they call me Gramps."

"Treating you okay?"

He said they were and that the food was fine. And he was allowed to smoke, which was fine too.

I said it gives you cancer, which was why I gave it up, but he began to cackle and said that cancer is like worms, pretty-colored worms that dig around inside you and finally carry you off.

"You don't mind being carried away?"

He said he didn't. I wanted to go then but he offered me a cigar. He still looked lonely so I thought I'd wait.

"I've been lucky," he said. "I'm over sixty-five. If I'd been under they would have put me in the institution that makes you go to class. Know what I mean?"

"Not quite," I said.

He gave up on his cigar—the leaves kept coming off—and shook the tin. The tin was empty so he looked at my cigar. I gave it to him. He thanked me. "Class is terrible," he said. "Frightening too. I was in the institution maybe ten years ago. It scared me, so I got normal and got the hell out." He shook his head. "Such goings-on. They give you wooden shoes and clothes that scratch and when there's food they ring a bell and you can't just go and eat, they expect you to play hopscotch in the corridors first." He mused for a while. "There was a big guy who scared me. In class that was. He would

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crush cans with his bare hands and look at me like he wanted to do the same thing to me."

"So you got out?"

He showed his brown teeth. "Yes. I told them the urge had gone. It hasn't, but what the hell. I got into the business of the mannequins. It kept me busy, I had to work for a change." He waved his hands excitedly. "I got up early, went to the fairs, sold them, delivered them myself in the van. I was all over the place."

"And the urge?" I asked—he had me curious now.

"Still there," he said, not too unhappily. "But I took care. I didn't shout *pow pow* any more, and I didn't point at them. I just sort of mumbled. They couldn't hear what I said."

"Mannequins?"

A nurse came. "Visitors' hour is over, Gramps," she said.

I was ready to go but Willems pushed me back into my chair. "You're cute," he told the nurse. "I wish I'd known you when you were still in the colonies. I would have lured you from the jungle with some beads and then, while you played with them, I would have jumped you. Ha!"

"You would?" the nurse said. She was brown and Indonesian and very pretty.

"Can't he stay?" Willems asked her softly. "I never get visitors and I haven't finished telling him my story yet."

"Right," the nurse said. "I'll go back to the jungle for a while. But don't take too long. We've got to clean up here and you'll be needing your nap."

She left the porch and Willems and I looked at her leaving. She had long straight legs and there were strong supple lines under her tight uniform.

"Nice," Willems said. "I had a mannequin like that once. I sold her in the end. Pity. But the customer offered a good price and she was somewhat damaged here and there. She'd been in the van too long and the van was soft in the springs. If they bounce around too much they scratch."

"So what were these mannequins?" I asked.

"For the window. My dead uncle used to own that business. He got them from the factory in Germany, slightly damaged merchandise, sold at a discount. I used to help him and when he croaked I took over. It was easy, really. If I paid the invoices, the Germans would send more. You should have seen them.

"I went to all the fairs where the storekeepers buy and I would

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sit in my own little corner, with all the mannequins around me stark naked, and I would adjust their arms and heads so they could beg the clients to take them away. 'Release us from this wicked sorcerer' they would scream and I would sit between them, quietlike."

"Were you gesturing too?"

"Me? Never. I just looked pathetic. When I don't make an effort I always look pathetic." Willems pushed up his glasses and stared at me. His eyes didn't focus. The corners of his mouth hung down—his cheeks too. "Well? Am I right?"

I agreed.

He was grinning at me again. "The business sort of prospered. Because the mannequins were cheap. I didn't earn much but I wasn't starving either. Not that I ever needed much money. I lived in my room with a view of the Leyden Square—I had a good position, my windows were right above the sandwich shop there. All I ever wanted to do was sit at the window, look at the crowd, and polish the Maxim—oil its works sometimes, tighten a screw here and there, adjust a spring."

I thought I hadn't heard right. "The *Maxim,* Mr. Willems?"

He was distracted by a sudden gust of wind that made the glass doors of the porch rattle but I managed to catch his attention again. I'm still a policeman, after all, even if I only run the uniform store these days, and a Maxim is a machine gun.

He was rubbing his hands. "Yes. The cops took it away. Good thing maybe. Perhaps it was time to retire. The cops said the Maxim was too much of a risk. Fully automatic arms are illegal and possession will take you to jail—and in my case it was worse because the gun was loaded, complete with all its parts and a couple of boxes of ammo."

"You mean you had a point fifty machinegun?"

"Sure had. But it was easy to get. I served with the RAF during the war, and later with the Dutch Air Force here. I was even a hero. You want to hear?"

I wanted to hear.

"I escaped to England," Willems said. "In 1943, the Jerries wanted me to work in a factory somewhere but I wasn't game. I lived on the coast before they moved us to make room for the Atlantic Wall, their bunkers and so forth, but I still knew the way. My brother knew the way too, and he found out where the Jerries kept their boats. He got us one, engine and all. We dressed up to look like Kraut sailors and one day we went. They saw us but on account of our

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clothes they thought we were them. Easy like eating Momma's pie—it always is when you really want something.

"Once we were out the British saw us and picked us up. We joined the RAF, him as a pilot. But he crashed somewhere. I flew on a Lancaster, in one of them plastic bubbles. She was a big mother—four engines, guns everywhere, full of bombs. Up and down we went, to Germany and back, me with my Maxim. I was lucky too—I got one of them Messerschmidts coming right at me. Press the button, there she went in smithereens. That's what I always wanted, know what I mean?"

I didn't, but Willems explained, rubbing his pointed chin, dribbling a little spittle every now and then. As a kid he used to have toy guns and he pointed them at pedestrians and cars—*pow pow,* you're dead. People laughed then, but they stopped laughing when Willems wasn't a kid any more and was still shouting *pow pow.*

"Why did you want them dead, Mr. Willems?"

He gave me a surprised look. "*Because.* Logic argumentation. The only way."

I pretended I agreed but he didn't seem to believe me.

"No! You don't use logic—nobody does! Listen, Mr. Visitor, this world is no good. I knew that from the start. My father used to clean windows and he was drunk most of the time. One day he missed the ladder and *whap,* there he was, out of it. Very clever of him. This life isn't even for the birds. It's a mistake, nothing else.

"Look at us, you ever see anyone smile? Or even take quiet pleasure in what he does? Life's nothing but trouble, hard labor, and misery—nothing works out. Meanwhile, it rains. With death at the end. Notice I don't even mention war. There's that, too, and disease." He shook his head. "Never get into it."

"But you did get into it, Mr. Willems," I said.

His bird's claw grasped my knee. "Could I help it? Did I have a choice? No questions asked, there I was." His small eyes glinted.

"Do you really mind that much, Mr. Willems?"

He laughed. "Maybe not so much, but that's because I found a way out. Here in Holland everybody always builds, always makes things bigger. Better. Healthier even." He raised a finger. "But that's where we are wrong. We've got to think the other way around. We don't have to build, we have to *break.* I thought the Jerries understood—they destroyed a lot when they came. Rotterdam, for instance. I happened to be there when they dropped their bombs. Did that city burn! For days I ran about, fire anywhere I went—bricks

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flying, beams bursting." And his finger touched my thigh. "I thought it was destroyed. But I was wrong."

"Rotterdam didn't burn?"

"Yes, but not enough. And the Germans wanted to build too. Destroy, yes, but then build forever—a new world, sky high, fools that they were." He was whispering now but a new thought cheered him up. "The British were better. You should have seen what that Lancaster did, and the other planes. All of Germany was burning down.

"Night after night I watched from my bubble on that airplane's belly. Everything below was red with flames, even the smoke. And the Maxim in front of me was always ready to fire, like when the Messerschmidt popped up. Yes, and pop she did, into a thousand bursts and bangs."

Willems was lost in his thoughts.

"And they let you take the Maxim home?"

He laughed and slapped my knee. "Now what did you think? Because I'm crazy I only talk craziness? Never. When the Führer gave in they sent me back to Holland. I was security sergeant at an airport. When the Maxim arrived in a box all I did was fill in a form. 'There you are, sergeant,' the soldiers said. 'Thank you, boys,' I answered."

"As easy as that?"

He shrugged. "Just after the war? With everything upside down?"

"Where did you take the gun?"

He looked sly. "Stored it safely and then had it taken to my room when they demobilized me. Then I re-assembled it carefully, loaded it, and pointed it at the crowd on the Leyden Square."

The thought staggered me. "For thirty-five years?"

"Most of the time."

"Loaded and ready?"

"Only during the evenings. Otherwise I locked it away."

"But you were in an institution," I said.

"Only for six months. I kept my rooms, and the Maxim was in the box."

"But you never fired it."

He scratched behind his ear. His spectacles came undone. "No."

"Good."

"Bad," Mr. Willems said loudly. *"Bad.* And weak. To think of the right solution is one thing, to go ahead is another. I've been childish, I know. I should have fired my darling, just once, on a summer night. A long burst, and then another. To prove a point." He produced his

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handkerchief and dabbed at his eyes. "I only fantasized instead, night after night. And now I'm here. A wasted end of a wasted life."

He was crying and rubbing at the tears impatiently. "The detectives have my Maxim. They came one evening. I still remember the older one's name. Grijpstra, he's called. They took the gun and wished me good night and the next morning the ambulance came and took me here. It was my own fault. I'd still be home if I hadn't placed the mannequin on the roof."

The nurse was back and stared at me. "Yes," I said and shook Mr. Willems' hand.

It was my day off but I drove back to Amsterdam. I'm still with the police although they won't put me on active duty since I lost the use of one leg. I went to Headquarters and found adjutant Grijpstra in the canteen, together with his sergeant. The sergeant's name is de Gier but he's often called "the movie star" because of his good looks. Grijpstra is my age—fifty-two. I know him well, we went to Police School together. I went and sat next to him and interrupted his argument with de Gier. They were each claiming that it was the other's turn to pay.

When I paid they calmed down somewhat.

"A Mr. Willems," I said. "The name is familiar?"

They thought for a while.

"Tell me more," de Gier said.

"A machine gun, and a mannequin."

Grijpstra eyed me morosely. "What's he to you? Not a relative, I hope?"

I described my meeting with Willems.

"Oh—right," Grijpstra acknowledged. "Thanks to de Gier's intelligence, we nabbed him. When the Chief Constable heard about it, he came all the way down from the top floor to shake the sergeant's hand."

"So what's the story?"

Grijpstra pointed at de Gier.

"No," de Gier said. "Not me. I should never have interfered with that business. I've told you before, adjutant, we should have let the suspect be."

Grijpstra is a kindly fellow. He married badly and lives an unhappy life, but if you don't raise your voice and keep pushing, he'll open up.

"Yes," he said now. "You know Café Tivoli? Big building on the

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Leyden Square? Flat roof? Went broke a while back and has been empty ever since? Okay. There was a mannequin on the roof a few months back, the kind they use in store windows. But it had been dressed up to resemble a little old guy. He had a bald head, with a bit of fringe left on, and a small nose with spectacles stuck to it. A suit, shoes—very realistic. And beside the mannequin was a machine gun, pointed at the square.

"It was imitation, naturally. The weapon was a stovepipe with a funnel attached to one end of it, the ammo consisting of pine cones sewn into a strip of canvas. The sight was made out of twisted wire. It looked real enough, especially from the square, and frightened civilians so much the desk sergeant thought he should send somebody to check it out."

"We happened to be around," de Gier said.

"So we went up," Grijpstra explained. "I tore my trousers and got myself dirty and the sergeant almost slipped off the roof—there's a lot of bird dung up there and it was raining, of course—but we did make it in the end. De Gier insisted on a thorough investigation—he even went back to get a camera."

De Gier nodded. "Of course."

"Of course," Grijpstra repeated. "The sergeant is an artist, you see, and a psychologist as well, and interested in furthering his career. We removed the mannequin. It fell apart on the way down, but we still had the photographs so the sergeant put them up in our room at Headquarters and spent a day or two studying them."

I looked at de Gier. He looked away.

"And finally," Grijpstra said, "our supersleuth came up with this. 'Whoever created this apparition,' he said, 'is crazy, and evil too. We will make an arrest.' "

"Which was wrong," the sergeant said.

"Which was right," said Grijpstra.

"Yes," I said. "And then?"

Adjutant Grijpstra rubbed the tabletop with his hand. "We found him. It wasn't hard. We knew what he looked like and that he had to be around the square. We ran into him the next evening when I took the sergeant to the sandwich shop to spend some money on him."

"Ha," de Gier said. "The smoked eel was on me. But the adjutant is right. We walked into him easily enough, and followed him to his rooms. The machine gun was there, oiled and greased and fully loaded."

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"So you had him removed to the nuthouse," I said.

"Where else?" Grijpstra asked. "How is he now?"

"Fine," I said. "Having his meals on time and being looked after by an Indonesian beauy. Very good of you, adjutant. A true danger to society if I ever came across one. Not a nasty sort of chap, really, but had he ever pressed that trigger there would have been a lot of blood on the cobblestones."

"It is the task of the police to protect the civilians against themselves," Grijpstra said.

De Gier got up. "We should have left the suspect be. What he explained that evening is absolutely dead right. An original thinker reasoning from a correct point of view. If we learn to destroy the environment and keep at it until there's nothing left, we have done with all misery once and forever. Life is suffering, so it follows that no life equals no suffering. Getting rid of the whole thing is the only way out."

De Gier walked to the canteen's counter and engaged the girl behind it in flirtation. She is a lovely creature, of the same order as Willems' nurse.

"One wonders," I said to Grijpstra, "if your sergeant should really be allowed to be a policeman."

Grijpstra got to his feet. "I have to go on patrol. The Lord only knows what the civilians are up to now."

I repeated my query.

"De Gier is an excellent policeman," Grijpstra said softly. "Bright and diligent. He has been studying Buddhism lately and contemplating the meaning of suffering. But I don't think he has obtained the right insight yet. Nice to see you again." He started to leave. "Do you think Willems is happy in that home?"

I thought about it. I said he probably was.

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

CELIA DALE

first publication in the United States

"Of course, it was all circumstantial, but it stood out a mile, really" . . .

ELEVEN YEARS AFTER

by CELIA DALE

Fancy me just happening to see it in the newspaper! Right down at the bottom of an inside page it was, only a few lines, I could easy have missed it. DEATH IN PRISON, it said, and underneath: "Frank Wisbey, sentenced to life imprisonment in 1961 for the murder of his wife Edna, has died in Hackenfield Prison. He was fifty-eight."

It gave me a turn, I can tell you. After all these years. Death comes to us all, of course; and of course, if it hadn't been for them changing the law Frank Wisbey would have been hung. Still, no matter what they found him guilty of, one wouldn't want that, would one? It's not nice to think about.

Well, when I read that piece in the evening newspaper I had to sit down. My legs just gave way. After a bit I got up and made myself a cup of tea, and as I sat and drank it of course I knew what I had to do. I'd always known, of course. But somehow it made me feel ever so funny. Ever such a funny mixture, I felt.

So the next morning I said to Mr. Harding I had to have a few days off on account of urgent business. He didn't like it much and grumbled a bit but in the end he had to agree. I'm the best typing-pool supervisor he's ever had and he knows it. I can keep those silly

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young girls in order like nobody's business; some of them have been there nearly six months and their work's as good as you'll find anywhere. I have my standards and I see they keep to them. They're only bits of girls, they respect authority if it's done with a smile. And I always smile. Whatever I feel inside, seething I may be, but I keep a smile.

So in my lunch hour I went to the travel agent and got my ticket to London for the next day. Tell you the truth, I quite looked forward to it. I hadn't been south for—oh, donkey's years and one can always do with a bit of a break, specially when you're as conscientious a worker as I am; and frankly, there's lots of places I'd rather live than what they call the industrial north. But I will say this for them, there's plenty of Go in them up there and they mind their own business.

On the whole I've not regretted it. I've a good position and a nice little flat a bit outside the city, right on the bus route. I keep it like a new pin, I can tell you, and I've lived very comfortable there these last few years, with no one to mess the place up and upset me or interfere. That's why I came in the first place.

Well, I packed a case and gave the flat a good clean (not that it needed it, but I like to have everything nice) and next morning I got on the train for London. I was nervous, I don't mind admitting it. But I've never let nerves stand in the way of what I've determined to do.

It's not that I'm nervous of traveling, I've got more sense than that. Though I've not been abroad like everyone else these days, I've been to Scotland on a coach trip and I even flew to Ireland on holiday one year—before the troubles, of course—and I wasn't a bit nervous in the plane. You see those silly bits of stewardesses that do it all the time, with their fancy hairdos and false eyelashes and nail varnish, and if they're not nervous it's not likely I'll be! No, I was nervous of going back. Yes, I was, I was nervous.

Well, I needn't have been, of course. Not many people traveling, business gentlemen mostly, it being mid-week, and quite a nice clean train. I treated myself to a meal in the dining car and it wasn't near so bad as what people make out. Quite nice really, and wonderful how those waiters don't spill anything. I closed my eyes for forty winks afterwards and it was dark by the time we got to London—and on time too. The railways aren't half so black as they're painted, if you ask me.

Anyway, I got a bus from the terminus (my word, how it's changed

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since I was there last!) and I found myself a room in a nice clean little hotel not far away and I took off my hat and coat and shoes and lay down on the bed, and here I am, going over it all in my mind. Until now, you see, I've just sort of acted automatic. After seeing that piece in the newspaper and getting over the shock, I'd known what I had to do, I made my plans and carried them through, just like I always do. But now, with nothing more to be done till tomorrow, I find it's all going round and round in my mind, over and over, just like I was reading it all in the newspaper again like it all came out at the trial, eleven years ago.

Frank Wisbey worked in the Accounts Department of one of them big factories out to the south of London, the real country not all that far away by car for a nice run at the weekend, and one of them big sewage farms, they call them, quite nearby, which wasn't all that nice really, I suppose, but you wouldn't notice it. He and his wife had a nice little house of their own, built in the 1920s, semidetached, a nice bit of garden front and back. But what made it really nice was that the rear garden ran down to a footpath along all the backs of the gardens and came out on a recreation ground, so it could never be built on. Cricket and football, a playground for the kiddies, a pond and a dirty old stream that fed it, more like a ditch really. But it was a really nice place to live and you'd never believe you was only a stone's throw away from the motorway—you know the kind of place.

They didn't have any children. She kept the house nice and he did the garden and they was as decent, respectable a couple as you could wish to meet. He was a bit younger than she was.

Well, she disappeared. Neighbors noticed they'd not seen her about, and when he was asked he gave out she'd gone to visit her auntie. Well, they thought it was funny, for no one had ever heard mention about no auntie. And then it began to come out he'd been seen around. With a girl. One of them young bits of things from his office, all long hair and—well, miniskirts hadn't hardly come in then, but whatever it was, she wore it. Half his age, keen on music and all that stuff like he was.

People began to come out with they'd been seen about quite a bit long before the wife disappeared—after dark, of course, in the recreation ground down by the pond, or sitting in his car in a side road once or twice. Now she was going into the house and staying a bit too long. They noticed the car being driven in and out in the night the first weeks, and then, after a month or two, she moved in. Well,

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that started the tongues wagging even more, and to cut a long story short, the police stepped in.

He didn't deny it. He couldn't, could he, for the girl was living there as bold as brass and too many people had seen them together long before, people at his firm as well as the neighbors. But he said he didn't know nothing about his wife. No, she'd not written. No, she'd not taken her clothes or her Post Office book or the few bits of jewelry her mum had left her, as far as he could tell; only the things she stood up in.

Funny, they said. Had there been any disagreement?

Well, yes, he said, there had been a few words. He had to admit it, you see, because the police already knew all about the girl. Had his wife found out about that, they asked. No, he said, he'd told her. He wanted to make the break, he said, go away with the girl and marry her, if you please—half his age! Great love, real passion, touching romance, all that sort of nonsense. Disgusting, really. His lawyer made a great thing of it all at the trial but it didn't do any of them much good.

So how had his wife taken it, said the police. Quietly, he said. She'd said she must think it all over and did he know what he was doing? He'd said he did, and she'd said, well, one thing was certain and that was she'd never give him his freedom. And he'd said then he'd go off with the girl anyway. And she'd said they must all think it over. There wasn't no row, he said.

Next day when he came home from business she'd asked him had he changed his mind and he said he hadn't. She didn't say nothing more, he said, but when he came back from business the next evening she was gone—no note, nothing, just gone.

Well, naturally the police was suspicious. I mean, missing wife, young girl, it's too neat, isn't it? They searched the place, house, garden, recreation ground. And in the pond they found her dentures.

It's not very nice to talk about, but it all come out at the trial, and the papers had a field day. Not the full set, just the bottoms, and the dentist checked they were hers. They found a shoe as well and a bangle she used to wear. And buried under the compost heap in the garden they found some underwear.

Well, you can imagine they just tore the place apart after that—went through it all with a fine-tooth comb, dug up the garden, had dogs and I don't know what-all up and down the path and the grounds, even went out to the sewage farm. But they never found nothing more.

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Well, of course they arrested him. They had to. Even without the body it was obvious, wasn't it? They don't like being without the body, of course, but there's several cases they've had to do without; you remember them, I expect. They must have been pretty sure of themselves or they wouldn't have risked proceedings. Of course, it was all circumstantial, but it stood out a mile, really. They fair took that sewage farm to pieces, but—well, it's not a very nice subject, is it? No wonder they couldn't find nothing more there, in the circumstances.

It was a big case. His lawyer made a good try for him, I will say that. Made out what a good chap he was, popular, kindly, wouldn't hurt a fly. Tried to make out his wife was a bit of a so-and-so, nagged him about the house and not smoking and wiping his feet, wouldn't have children. Made a great thing about the girl, like I said—great romance, all that stuff, how she'd sold her story to one of the newspapers just so she could pay for his trial, how she'd stand by him forever, knew he was innocent.

The other side soon put paid to that. He hadn't a chance, not with the way the case built up against him—although I will say the jury took their time about reaching the verdict, and one of them said afterwards in a newspaper interview that he was glad they didn't still have them hung.

Well, there it was. He got life. And she got nothing. She never even got him, not even after all her years of waiting, standing by him and all that lark. She'd be down her thirties now—a bit late to start again, especially without him. He'd have been out in a year or so, too, the way they do it now. Life sentence doesn't mean what it used to, more's the pity.

But I think she got the house. It was his, you see, and of course I never claimed it. Well, I couldn't, could I? She's welcome to it, I'm quite content where I am, thank you, with my own little place with no one messing it up and going behind my back and making a fool of me to all the neighbors. Throwing back in my face all the years I gave him, keeping the place nice, keeping respectable—carrying on with a silly bit of a girl young enough to be his daughter, sighing and sobbing, making big speeches, having sex . . . Disgusting.

I had a spare set, you see. It was easy. They was old, didn't fit as well as the ones I dumped in the pond with the other things after dark; but I found a good dentist up north after a year or two when the case was all forgotten, and he soon fixed me up. I took just the housekeeping money and a coat I never wore much and pawned my

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engagement ring and got on the train with no one any the wiser. I touched up my hair a bit next day and wore my glasses and no one ever gave me a second look. They mind their own business up north. It was days before anyone knew I was gone except Frank, and he was keeping quiet about it naturally.

I never meant to come back really. Let them fry, I thought. But I'll go down to the house tomorrow, see if she's still there. Loss of memory, I'll say. No one can prove different.

I can't wait to see her face.

DETECTIVERSE

PRESSED FOR TIME

by MARGUERITE BURANELLI

A quick-witted laundress named Dot
Heard a burglar and rushed to the spot.
He tried to sneak out
But she gave him a clout
And struck while the iron was hot.

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a *NEW* short story by

HENRY T. PARRY

Everett Dremer was the best engineer in the huge company of 12,000 employees. He was the one all the other engineers came to with their work problems, and Dremer solved them. But every year, when promotions were announced, Dremer was overlooked, bypassed, brushed off, neglected, left on the vine merely to help the younger ones advance. Dremer couldn't take it any more . . .

DEATH IMMINENT

by HENRY T. PARRY

Ratty would have to go. The latest rumor on the corporate grapevine had condemned him, another instance of Ratty's callous injustice, an indignity that would be Ratty's last.

Dremer unlocked the middle drawer of his desk, pulling it half open so that he could quickly close it should the clicking of Miss Billings' typewriter in the outer office cease. He untied the cord that bound the envelope and slid out the gun and notebook, not smiling as he used to at the words written on the envelope: *Core rod control fitting. Radioactive. Do not handle.* He had found the gun at the bottom of his old barracks bag where he had put it all those years ago. How long had it been lying in his desk drawer? Three months? Six months? Long enough anyway to permit the only possible plan of action to mature.

The murderously efficient, foreign look of the weapon, the bluish sheen of the metal, the fine cross-hatching of the grip, all gave Dremer a sense of identity, of a secret power that would cause him to be recognized in this company of 12,000 employees. The gun no longer represented a means of killing, but rather an instrument for achieving justice in a disorderly and unjust world.

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Slipping the gun back into the envelope, Dremer opened the notebook. Item by item he scanned the condensed account of the intolerable affronts he had suffered at Ratty's hands. And Ratty, before he died but aware of imminent death—oh, yes, no point otherwise—would have each count of the indictment read to him. And the sentence that had been passed for each count would be read as well. As Dremer read over each charge that would be made, his resentment grew, and he knew that the day of judgment for Ratty must be soon.

Dremer could see clearly how it would begin.

Miss Billings would appear at the door of his office. But the thought of Miss Billings diverted him from his daydream. Henrietta Billings, Ratty's secretary, managed to combine a fortyish ripeness with a vintage vinegary attitude. She performed the occasional minor tasks that Dremer needed—his requirements being modest since his work was too intricate to be trusted to dictation—but was at pains never to let Dremer forget that she was his boss's secretary, that Mr. Arthur Radkey's needs came first. Even so, he would have preferred less attention from Miss Billings, who answered his phone, unnecessarily filled his water bottle twice a day, ordered coffee to be sent in at ten, and each day when he was out for lunch straightened the papers on his desk. Never, he noted with indifference, did she put the occasional bouquet in his office as she did in Ratty's. Even on those rare occasions when he had the door of his office closed, he felt that Miss Billings' x-ray sense knew exactly what was being discussed.

But on the day it would happen, Miss Billings would stand at the door of his office.

"Mr. Radkey wants you to step across to his office."

Dremer sensed that she took satisfaction in relaying Ratty's commands, that it permitted her to share in Ratty's authority over him. Ratty no longer came over himself the way he used to, for a few minutes of idle chat.

"And bring the papers on the Falls project. And any other pertinent papers." As though Dremer needed to be reminded. As though he did not realize that Miss Billings' attitude toward him reflected Ratty's own.

Dremer would then unlock the desk drawer, take out the gun and notebook, and go across the outer office where Miss Billings sat like some solitary guardian of the sanctum, his notebook under his arm, his coat pocket sagging. It would follow the same pattern as on all

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the other occasions he had been in Ratty's office. At first. Having crossed the wall-to-wall desert to the sterile oasis where Ratty sat, he would sit down in front of Ratty's desk—he did not believe the office rumor that Ratty had the legs of the chair shortened so its occupants would have to look up at him—a desk whose surface bore only the telephone and a memo pad imprinted: "From the desk of Arthur Radkey."

Ratty's rimless glasses would glitter as he swiveled in his chair to look out the window. Why was it the glasses of other people never glittered? Why was it Ratty never turned to look out the window until you sat down? Then Ratty would turn abruptly, stare at him for a long minute, and say something like, "Now why is it, Dremer, that when everyone else on my staff seems able to—"

"Get ready to die, Ratty," Dremer would say.

Ratty would take a fresh look at him, a startled look, as if for the first time he was aware of an effective presence in his office. His look of astonishment would slowly be replaced by that expression of impatient dismissal that Dremer knew so well. When Ratty saw what was in Dremer's hand, aimed directly at the scholastic honorary key that dangled on the bulge of his waist, Ratty wouldn't turn pale or stutter or plead. Not at first.

"Come off it, Dremer. Unscrew the butt of that thing, shake out a couple of those colored candy pills that are in there, and let's get going. We're running a serious business here."

Oh, that would be rich. Colored candy pills. As if it was one of those guns made of glass that were packed with candies, the kind you could buy years ago at the corner store, the only kind of gun Ratty would have expected Dremer to have. But he would disregard what Ratty was saying, flip open his notebook, and read the first count of his indictment.

"Arthur Radkey for years has failed to recognize how important I am to this company. For this, I, Everett Dremer, punish him with death."

"Dremer, what's got into you?" Ratty would ask.

"Shut up, Ratty. You listen to me. I'm the best engineer in this company. I spend half my day on the phone solving problems the young fellows out in the divisions tell me their bosses can't help them with. But here I am on your staff, propping you up, and propping up the rest of the department. 'Good old Dremer. Lovable old Dremer. "Don't tax your brains, kid, ask old Dremer." ' "

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"But you're one of the best paid people in the department," Ratty would say.

"It's not a matter of pay. As I just read to you, I am not recognized. You constantly overlook me." When would Ratty learn that money wasn't everything. In Ratty's case, he thought, never.

"Dremer, you must have gone off your rocker. Now put that thing away."

"Rocker. How appropriate. That brings me to the second count of my indictment." Ratty would look at him with dawning fear as Dremer read from his notebook.

"Arthur Radkey has disregarded my advice. For this he will die. Remember, Ratty, how you asked me to clear a contractor's design for rocker arms, an outmoded device to begin with?"

"It was what Export sold the customer. You know that. Anyway, it was hardly within your field of responsibility, was it?"

"No, it wasn't. I'm not shooting you because you're wasting money. I sent you a memo recommending that the design be rejected. You ignored what I said. Ignored it."

"Things had advanced too far."

"But the way you ignored it. I never heard, after I sent my advice to you, what you were going to do. But the factory told me. They were going ahead. When I tried to ask you about it, you brushed me off, dismissed me as if my opinion was worthless, as if an underling like me shouldn't overreach himself and meddle in policy matters. You tore up my memo, I'm told."

"You bet I did. I assumed you did the same. Now look, put that thing away."

"Of course I didn't. I kept it to cover myself in case the old school tie came unraveled."

"Old school tie? What's that got to do with all this?"

"When the factory installed those rocker arms, twenty-five percent of them failed. But Les Freeman, the factory manager, covered for you. Said it was metal fatigue, or something like that. You and he were classmates."

"Dremer, you're spinning webs, seeing relationships, attitudes, things that don't exist. Now please—"

Yes, he would even say, "Please." Grudge-mouthed, thin-lipped Ratty would say, "Please." The man who did not reply when you said "Good morning" to him in the elevator, but beamed in adulation if the president stepped in behind you.

"Dremer, be careful. Don't point that at me. It might go off."

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"When it goes off, it won't be accidental, Ratty. Now, one more count." He would read again from the notebook. "Arthur Radkey has passed me up for promotion. For this he will die." He would snap the notebook shut and slide the safety off on the gun.

"I've seen the kids I have trained go out of here and take Chief Engineers' jobs in the divisions. Soltman to Eastern, with only ten years' experience. Olney to Western, only twelve years."

"They aren't the important divisions, Dremer, you know that. Now, if it had been Southern, that would have been worth getting."

"Exactly what I am coming to. I've heard on the grapevine—and my sources are reliable, as you ought to know—that Bill Davis, the Chief Engineer of Southern, is going out at the end of the year. I've earned that job."

He knew precisely what Ratty would say in reply. "You will certainly be considered. Of course, your age does present a problem."

" 'Be considered! Be considered!' How often have I heard that. I know who you're giving the job to. Charley Collins, Les Freeman's son-in-law. Freeman, the man who covered up for you at the factory. Oh, I could see it coming. Dipping Collins into the various departments so it will look good on his personnel record, look like he's had wide interdepartmental experience. Oh, he won't fall on his face. He's got me and my boys to keep him out of trouble. You don't think there's injustice there? When I have to back up the man who gets the job I've earned?"

"Psychiatric treatment, Dremer, that's what you need. Think about it. The company has an arrangement with the City Institute. We could get you in there without any trouble. Nobody need know."

"You think I'm crazy, Ratty, is that it? Yes, I suppose so. If a man tries to get what's due him after years of service, years devoted to the interests of the company, you think he needs treatment. Push your phone over to my side of the desk."

Holding the gun aimed directly at Ratty's middle, he would dial the number. When he heard it answered, he would shove the phone back to Ratty.

"This is your wife. Just tell her one thing. Goodbye. That's all."

Slowly, his movements congealed by growing terror, Ratty would pick up the instrument. Hello, Patricia (or Kate or whatever), he would say, his voice a trembling whisper, I called to say—

The slugs would knock Ratty back in his leather chair, and Dremer would be released. Gone the dutiful, hard-working, intelligent employee who had put the company's interests ahead of his own, who

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had kept the faith in spite of years of neglect. Now at last he was working for himself. He would leave Ratty's office, walk past the oblivious Miss Billings busy at her typewriter, and go out of the company forever. Vindicated, recognized, once more a whole man.

He would have to go. There was no other way after what he had told her. She decided that as she sat in her car in the restaurant parking lot, her tears slowly diminishing, replaced by anger, her humiliation hardening into resolve.

The waiter had served their dinner and left them when, without preliminaries, with blunt cruelty, he told her. He recited the clichés, "We promised always to be honest with each other," and "We both knew it would have to end sometime," and "You remember we agreed that when it happened, we would end it clean and sharp, no clinging, no tears."

The words "clean and sharp," in the light of her new determination, suddenly acquired a grim meaning. She listened to him in bewildered shock, followed by a sick, growing anger, as, in words that seemed to be borrowed from beauty parlor magazines, he explained the necessity for their separation.

"Our youngest graduated in June," he had said. "Driving home from commencement, she put it to me. 'You've got to choose between her and me,' she said."

She was unable to speak, her mind dimly struggling to sort out the implications of what he was telling her. She stared down at her untouched plate, conscious that he, between reasonable, open-minded explanations of his position, kept on eating. Why had she not noticed before this insensitivity in his nature? Once she had seen in him qualities which she thought went unnoticed by the less perceptive: an honesty that at times bordered on the stiff-necked, a charitable patience with the shortcomings of others, a willingness to entertain opinions he did not agree with—all these balanced, she realized, by a touchiness to personal slights, mostly imaginary, a readiness to see injustice where it did not exist, and, above all, a driving ambition to get ahead in his company.

"—and, after all, she isn't young any more," he was saying.

Neither am I, she thought.

"And she is so dependent, while you are competent and able to stand on your own two feet."

It used to be the children that kept you from divorcing her and marrying me, she thought. Now it's her dependency. But the truth

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is you're tired of me, you're unloading me, like an unprofitable investment.

She thought of the many restaurants like this one, where they had gone to be together, choosing places far from home to keep their relationship hidden. His position in the company demanded secrecy. Marital peccadillos committed by lower echelons were overlooked, but there was an unstated rule, he had told her, that an employee who wished to progress beyond, or even retain, a certain level of management must lead an exemplary life. Because the results of infractions of this rule were readily apparent, in the form of shelf jobs.

She had accepted his views in this matter as she had accepted so many of his attitudes and beliefs, because she felt that he knew what was best for his career. Keeping their affair secret had required infinite care, meticulous lying, and drives of a hundred miles or more to motels and restaurants where they would not risk the chance encounter. Their efforts, she was certain, had been successful. Except for his wife, whose stubborn pride imposed a bitter silence, she was sure no one knew of their relationship.

"Maybe we could still meet from time to time," he said, picking up the menu.

Looking at the menu was not, she knew, for him a device to be employed until she could summon herself to discuss the matter further, an empty occupation of the hands and eyes while the mind was elsewhere. She knew that he looked at the menu because at this moment the act of selecting his dessert was of equal importance with his announcement that their affair of five years must end.

She looked at him in anger and contempt, picked up her things, and went out to her car, determined that there would be no public tears. On the long drive home, detail by detail the plan formed in her mind.

"I think I'll just settle for the chocolate ice cream," he said to the waiter.

Miss Billings appeared at his office door.

"Mr. Radkey would like to see you right away, Mr. Dremer," she said.

Was there a new note in her voice? Or only an absence of what he thought to be her poorly masked impatience? Or was it contempt? Whatever it was, her next words indicated that her customary official attitude toward him remained unchanged.

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"No, he did not say what he wanted. If Mr. Radkey had wished me to tell you what he had in mind, he would have instructed me."

"It's inevitable," he said. "The one morning when the boss wants to see you the first thing, you're late. Traffic was held up on the bridge again."

"Yes, I heard about it on the radio." She looked faintly pleased. "I expected that you would be late."

And I bet you were certain Ratty knew it, he thought.

He walked across to Ratty's door, knocked briefly, and walked in. Ratty was tilted forward, his forehead resting on the memo pad inscribed: "From the desk of Arthur Radkey," his arms stretched out on the desk in grim obeisance, two small holes in the leather back of his chair.

Dremer stared at the body in horror. Was this what *he* had wanted to do? What he had promised in his notebook to do?

He ran out of the office to where Miss Billings sat at her typewriter, putting her gloves away in her desk drawer.

"He's dead! Mr. Radkey's dead! Somebody shot him."

"You did," Miss Billings said coldly.

"What? No! No! I never did." He hesitated, as if examining the truth of his words. "But no, I didn't. What are you saying?"

"You shot Mr. Radkey. Just as you planned to."

Dremer stared at her in bewilderment, appalled at the enormity of his fantasy made real.

"You left your desk key in the lock one day when you went out to lunch. I had it duplicated at a place where it isn't likely they'll remember me. Next day, at lunchtime, I went through your desk and found your notebook. I reproduced those pages where you wrote about killing Mr. Radkey. I also found your gun."

"Are you out of your mind? Stop talking like that. He's dead, I tell you. Call a doctor. Call the police."

"I've already done both. A few minutes before I told you Mr. Radkey wanted to see you."

Open-mouthed, gasping, hands half raised as if to ward off an approaching enemy, Dremer became aware of the walls closing in around him. Miss Billings, incredibly, inserted paper in her typewriter and under her swift fingers the words marched across the page.

"Wait. There's something wrong. It didn't happen yet. I never meant, I didn't realize what it would be like."

"The first thing the police will do," Miss Billings said, whipping

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the paper from the machine, "is search your desk. I'll make sure of that. You know what they will find. Minus two bullets that will be found somewhere else. And they'll find your notebook, of course."

He tottered to the chair beside her desk and sat down, staring at the patternless carpet. Had he really done it? Had he at last carried out the satisfying dream that had nourished him through the years of disappointment and frustration? If so, where was the sensation of freedom, the soaring of spirit that the sight of Ratty dead should have brought?

He heard the elevator door slide open, heard the approaching tread of official feet. He covered his face in his hands and began to sob, unaware that Miss Billings had placed the typed confession conveniently near him on the desk.

DETECTIVERSE

SIR ROGER'S WISH

by DAVID H. GALERSTEIN

Said Roger to Sir Henry B.,
"I need a car, Dad, as you see."
Sir Henry said, "I do agree,
A brand-new Honda it shall be."

"But why a Honda, Dad, m'Lord,
Why buy the Japanese Accord?
Why can't I have an English Ford?
It's a car we can afford."

"Son, when you drive o'er Dartmoor's hills,
Past mires and meres and mellow hills,
Good Devon's folk will see, with chills,
The Honda of the Baskervilles."

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a *NEW* detective story by

CLARK HOWARD

The bad heroin—death snow—was being smuggled in on the 747 from Lima, Peru. There were hundreds of places on the 747 where the tainted drug could be hidden . . . What might be called a procedural detective story—and you will find the exhaustive, step-by-step, no-stone-left-unturned search of Fat Albert a fascinating procedure . . .

DEATH SNOW

by CLARK HOWARD

When Henry Doyle entered the Centennial Airlines operations office, he encountered two men he had never seen before.

"Henry," said the operations manager, "these gentlemen are from the Drug Enforcement Administration—agents Ralph Landers and Lew Marsh. Gentlemen, this is Henry Doyle, our 747 coordinator for overseas flights." Doyle shook hands and sat down with the agents facing the operation manager's desk.

"Mr. Doyle," the older agent, Landers, said, "do you recognize this?"

Doyle took the article the agent held out. "An aluminum-foil peanut package," he said. He looked at the back of the small empty package and saw a company name in Spanish. "Looks like the kind we pick up in Lima, Peru, on the return leg of our Flight 211."

"That's exactly what it is," Landers confirmed.

The operations manager leaned forward on his desk. "They found that package in the coat pocket of a drug dealer last week, Henry. A dead drug dealer."

"The dead man's name was Urcos," Landers continued. "He was a known middle-man between a group of Peruvian heroin manu-

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facturers and a retail drug ring operating in New York City. In addition to being a dealer, he was also a user. That's why he's dead—he shot some death snow, as they call it—bad heroin—and it killed him." The agent locked eyes with Henry Doyle. "We think the bad dope came in on Centennial's Flight 211 from Lima."

Henry shrugged. "It's possible."

"You don't seem surprised," Landers said, eyebrows raising.

Now Henry grunted softly. "Mr. Landers, Flight 211 is a Boeing 747 aircraft. Do you know what we call a 747? We call it Fat Albert. The reason we call it that is because it's 235 feet long, 54 feet high, has a wingspan of 196 feet, and with a full payload weighs 780,000 pounds. It carries 450 passengers for distances up to 7,000 miles. Am I supposed to be shocked that someone would smuggle dope on it?"

The operations manager smiled. "Henry has been with Centennial for 28 years, gentlemen. There's not much he hasn't seen."

"Perhaps he has some ideas about *how* drugs could be smuggled aboard his Fat Albert," Landers said.

"I'd hate to try and count the ways," Henry told him. "Stuff could be hidden in any one of the 450 seats. In any one of 13 toilets. In the overhead compartments. In the tray-table arms. In the pillows. In the catering supplies, the crew's carry-on luggage, the fuel tank crawlspace—a hundred places. Two hundred."

"How many people have access to those places, Mr. Doyle? How many people are involved in getting a 747 into the air?"

"Well, let's see"—Doyle began to jot numbers down on a scratch pad—"there are 22 people on the cleaning crew; six baggage handlers; there are two men on the bucket truck that empties the lavatories; one man on the oil truck, two on the fuel truck, one air-conditioning man, one window washer, two cockpit engineers to test the plane's engines; then there are 16 cabin attendants and a three-man flight crew. That's a total of 56 people."

"You left somebody out," Landers said.

Henry frowned. "Who?"

"Yourself. The 747 coordinator."

"Fifty-seven," Henry amended.

"Now then," said Landers, "among those people, which of them have access to the entire plane? To every area?"

"None of them. They all have assigned work areas."

"You left somebody out again."

"I keep forgetting myself," said Henry. "You're right—the whole

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plane is mine. What are you getting at? Does that make me your best suspect?"

"On the contrary, it makes you the best man to help us find the pipeline. No, you're not a suspect, Mr. Doyle. You've been thoroughly checked out." Landers took a notebook from his pocket and read from a page. "Henry Albert Doyle, age 50, widower, wife died five years ago, no children, lives alone in a small home in a nice neighborhood, mortgage paid for three years ago, drives a 1978 Ford, hobby stamp collecting, two pet cats, takes a two-week vacation every July to visit brother and family in Indiana, employed by Centennial Airlines since 1954, spotless record."

"You left out the chocolate-chip ice cream," said Henry.

"What?"

"Chocolate-chip ice cream. It's my favorite dessert. You left that out."

Landers suppressed a smile. "I'll speak to my staff about that."

Henry sat back in his chair. "What is it you want me to do?"

"Like I said, help us find the pipeline. So we can plug it up and stop some of this heroin traffic—particularly this death snow that's coming in." Landers turned now to Lew Marsh, the younger agent who had been sitting there quietly. "We've arranged with your personnel department to have Agent Marsh start work Monday as a plant. His cover will be that he's a 747 coordinator trainee hired for another airport, and that you're training him. He'll work right at your side in all phases of your job, just as if you were actually teaching him the ropes. We hope with what Agent Marsh knows about drug smuggling, and what you know about the 747, that together you can plug this particular pipeline."

Henry looked at Lew Marsh. He was a nice-looking, clean-cut young man with a suggestion of quiet strength about him. Henry decided that he would not be too much trouble.

"All right, I'll help you all I can," he told the agents.

Lew Marsh reported for work on Monday and Henry briefed him on the itinerary of Flight 211. "It originates here on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Flies to Lima, lays over six hours, and flies back here. Lays over here three hours and makes a run to LaGuardia and back. Then the cycle starts over again."

Lew Marsh nodded. "Landers thinks the drugs are going through the airport here and being taken off in New York. It's a domestic

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flight after the layover here—there's no customs check in New York."

Henry's brow wrinkled.

"You think the stuff just stays hidden on the aircraft, and whoever's carrying it gets back on for the trip east."

"That person or an accomplice."

"I don't see how any of the crew could be involved then," said Henry. "There's a complete change of flight and cabin crews before 211 goes on to LaGuardia."

"A crew member on the Lima flight might just be a gardener," Lew told him. "Someone who's paid to plant the dope on the plane. Then a mule—an actual smuggler—picks it up on the domestic leg of the flight and takes it off the plane in New York." Lew noticed a look of displeasure on Henry's face. "I know how you feel—you hate to suspect any of your employees. That's understandable. But I hope you also understand that I *have* to suspect them—*all* of them.

"It's not unusual in air-smuggling cases to have *two* people involved—one in the flight crew, one on the ground crew. A cabin attendant has been known to pass a parcel of dope to someone on a fuel truck. A navigator might be working with the caterer who puts the food trays on board. We even had a case where heroin was being passed to the Department of Agriculture agent who inspects the unloaded baggage for boxes of fruit and vegetables that people try to bring home. The stuff was being smuggled in a fake *ica*, which is a kind of small watermelon from Brazil. It was hollow, made of very realistic-looking rubber, and buried in a bag of real *ica* fruit. The Ag inspector simply seized the whole bag and at a convenient time removed the fake fruit. He worked the scam for several years before he got caught."

"How'd they catch on?" Henry asked.

Lew grinned. "The IRS made a routine audit on his income tax and found that he was spending about three times what he was grossing in salary. They tipped the Department of Agriculture, and Ag tipped us. The guy's still a fruit and vegetable inspector, only now he does it in the main kitchen at Leavenworth." Lew shrugged. "Anyway, you can see why I have to take a hard look at everybody, can't you?"

Henry reluctantly nodded. "Sure, I guess." He tilted his head curiously. "That include me too?"

"Only if you've got something to hide," the young agent replied evenly . . .

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The next day, Tuesday, Henry let Lew help him with the routine overhaul of Fat Albert after it arrived from its Lima run. Touchdown was at 10:50 but the big plane did not reach the passenger gate until 11:06.

"Because of its size, it has an extra-long taxi," Henry explained as they walked down the jetway. "After the passengers disembark and the luggage is unloaded, the ship will be pulled over to a special concrete apron for the cockpit engineers to test its engines. That's necessary because of the force of the engines when they're turned on. If they tried testing them on the regular asphalt aprons, the blast would peel the asphalt back like a banana."

At the end of the jetway Henry lifted a wall phone and pushed four digits. When he got an answer, he referred to a clipboard he carried and said, "Hello, Immigration, this is Doyle. Two-eleven's on the ground from Lima with 351 aboard." Turning to Lew as he hung up, he explained, "That's so the Customs hall will have enough agents to handle the traffic."

When the big jet completed its taxi up to the gate and locked onto the jetway, the forward hatch was opened and the senior cabin attendant handed Henry the plane's two logs, on another clipboard. "One of these is for maintenance"—he showed it to Lew as they left the jetway and went down to the gate apron. "See, this one says the auxiliary engine sounds rough and coughed a little smoke on the takeoff from Chavez International in Lima. The Lima airport is only 32 meters high—about a hundred feet above sea level—so the engine probably took on a little extra moisture. That's usually as serious as it ever gets with Fat Albert—but to be on the safe side it will be thoroughly checked.

"Now this second log is the cabin log. These are the things my interior crew have to take care of. Seats 12-C and 31-H won't recline. Four tray tables are loose. One toilet won't flush. Beverage spilled on three seats—they have to be replaced. Two headset jacks are malfunctioning. Four overhead lights are out. An air-conditioning vent won't rotate. So on and so forth. A 747's like a newborn baby—requires constant care and attention."

They walked to the rear of the plane, past the belly where six baggage handlers were already unloading the containerized baggage buckets. At the rear door they waited as a portable stairway was rolled over and locked in place. The 22-person cleaning crew drove up in vans loaded with their equipment. Henry checked his watch.

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"Usually takes twelve minutes for the passengers to clear. They should be just about out now. Follow me."

Lew followed him up the stairs and into the rear of the long passenger deck. Far ahead up front they could see the last few passengers moving slowly into the jetway. "As soon as the last one is off, my interior crew moves in and starts cleaning up," Henry told him. "You may not believe this, but off the average 747 flight we'll clean out two *tons* of trash. In addition to doing that, every tray table has to be wiped clean, every headrest cover replaced, clean cases put on the pillows, the blankets refolded and stowed, all seatback pockets cleaned out, all ashtrays emptied, and the entire ship steam-vacuumed."

"Quite a job," Lew commented, impressed.

"That it is," said Doyle. "Now then, exactly what is it that you want to do?"

"Let me have one of the clipboards and I'll just observe," Lew said.

Henry tore off the top sheet of one of the clipboards and handed the board to him. Then he leaned back out the rear door where his clean-up people waited.

"Okay, crew, let's hit it."

The crew hurried aboard and began their systematic work. It was all done quickly and efficiently, with no wasted motion, and with a choreography of practised movement that kept everyone out of everyone else's way. As they worked, Lew Marsh moved as unobtrusively as possible up and down the two long aisles, pretending to casually observe, occasionally making a meaningless note or two, all the while watching with his trained eyes for a suspicious move of any kind.

The first such move he saw, ironically, was made by Henry Doyle. Out of the corner of his eye Lew noticed the older man move to a forward bulkhead, step up on a seat, and open a compartment up near the overhead. Frowning, Lew watched him stretch his arm in and struggle slightly as if trying to reach something.

Lew walked up to him. "Mr. Doyle, what are you doing?"

Henry glanced down. "Just looking for my package of heroin," he said in mock innocence. Then Lew heard the snap of a switch, followed by a soft humming sound. "Rewinding the movie film," Henry said wryly.

"Oh. Sure."

Feeling a little embarrassed, Lew resumed walking up and down the aisles.

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Uncovering nothing unusual in his observation of the interior crew on Tuesday's flight, Lew moved on to other areas of the plane. On Thursday he concentrated on the baggage handlers, staying with them from the time the big containerized baggage buckets were lowered from the underside of the plane onto the caterpillar-like train of flatbed wagons that transported them across the apron to the baggage bay. The bay was at the bottom of a conveyor belt that moved the luggage up to the baggage claim area where passengers then picked their individual bags off a rotating carousel.

In the bay, Lew watched, clipboard in hand, making notes, as Henry's six handlers opened each containerized bucket and in swift, practised movements set the bags on the moving belt. He kept particularly alert for any bag or other parcel that might be set aside and not sent up to the carousel. Now and again his attention was drawn to a suitcase that had snapped open or a garment bag that had come unzipped, and he watched closely as one of the handlers strapped the suitcase shut or taped the garment bag closed, before sending it upstairs. The men worked efficiently, expertly, and in a scant few minutes all the containers had been emptied and were parked in a transit zone until ready to be loaded for the flight to LaGuardia.

After the handlers had left, Lew checked each bucket to make certain it was completely empty. Then he searched the bay from one end to the other, just in case one of the men had been able to stash a kilo without his observing it. But he found nothing. As he was standing there looking disappointed, Henry Doyle came in.

"Anything?" Henry asked.

"Nothing," Lew replied, shaking his head.

"Can't say I'm sorry," Henry told him. "I don't have a single baggage handler who's been with me less than ten years. They're good men, all of them."

Lew sighed quietly. "On Saturday's flight I'll work the refueling apron," he said.

On Saturday he worked not only the refueling operation, but also the air-conditioning operation, the window-washing operation, and the oiling operation, which for safety reasons were performed at different times. He uncovered nothing in any of his observations, and came back to Doyle's office frustrated and irritable.

"You had a couple of calls," Henry said as Lew slumped down in a chair. "A young lady named Trisha called and said she had to

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break your date tonight. Her mother's very ill and she had to leave town."

"Wonderful," Lew muttered.

"And your boss, Landers, wants you to contact him as soon as possible."

Lew called Ralph Landers. Henry listened to Lew's side of the conversation. "No, sir, nothing yet . . . I realize that, sir, but it's a very big airplane . . . " Then Lew frowned. "Three more? Are we certain there's a connection?" He listened for a long time then before finally saying, "Yes, sir, I'll step it up. Right, sir. Goodbye."

When he hung up, Lew looked across the room at Henry. "They've found three more bodies. One dealer and two users. All with the same symptoms as the dead man we found last week."

Henry's eyebrows went up. "You think they died from the same bad dope? The stuff you think is coming in on 211?"

"Looks that way."

Henry nodded slowly. "This dealer, I take it he was a user too."

"Yes. Most of the lower echelon dealers *are* users. They work as mules or pushers or in other capacities to support their own habits. Only the top men, who run the operations, and the cutters, who dilute and package the stuff for street sale, are non-addicts. So this death snow that's coming in will be wasting the dealers and the junkies alike."

"And now your boss wants you to get the job done a little quicker, huh? Well, I wish you luck, my boy." Henry put on his coat and picked up his newspaper. "We're off Sunday and Monday. Nothing you can do now until the next scheduled run on Tuesday. See you then." At the door Henry paused. "You got another date to take Trisha's place?"

Lew shook his head morosely. "No."

"Want to spend the evening at my place? I can offer you a barbecued steak, some cold beer, and the fights on cable TV. Probably a poor substitute for Trisha, but—"

"You serious?" Lew asked, surprised.

"Sure."

"You've got a deal," Lew said, smiling for the first time all week.

Henry Doyle lived in a small tract home a mile from the airport. When they entered the living room, Lew saw that it still contained obvious touches of the late Mrs. Doyle—lace arm covers on the sofa

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and chairs, a vase of silk flowers, even a current copy of *Good Housekeeping*.

"I've never had the heart to let her subscription run out," Henry said, seeing Lew notice the magazine. "Every year I keep renewing it, just like she was still here to read it."

Lew, somehow touched, nodded but said nothing. Following Henry into the kitchen, he paused to look at a framed photograph on the wall. It showed a man and woman in their late forties, and a beautiful, dark-haired girl of perhaps twenty. The man looked a great deal like Henry Doyle.

"My brother in Indiana," Henry said from the kitchen door. "I go there for a two-week vacation every July, remember? That's his wife and daughter."

"Pretty girl," said Lew. He went on into the kitchen. "What can I do to help?"

"Just don't get in my way," Henry said. "I barbecue nearly every night in the summertime. Got it down to a science."

Doyle's patio was small and cozy, just large enough for his grill, a quartet of chairs, and folding snack trays. Lew noticed that the steaks Henry brought out were wrapped in paper imprinted: *AIRLINES CATERING*. Henry smiled at the younger man's observation. "Fringe benefit," he said easily. "People who work in offices bring home paper clips and rubber bands. I bring home airline steaks."

"Good thing you don't work in a bank," Lew said wryly.

It was a nice evening. The filets were prime, cooked just right; the beer was German, bottled, ice-cold; and the fights on the cable were exciting without being excessively gory. And Henry's two cats, after a respectable period of aloofness, allowed Lew to pet them.

"How'd a nice young fellow like you get into the dirty business of chasing drug peddlers?" Henry asked, when the meal and the fights were over and they were having some chocolate-chip ice cream.

Lew Marsh shrugged. "Process of elimination. I was with the military police in the army; I found out I liked law enforcement. When I came home I finished college on the G.I. Bill. Then I applied to the FBI, the Secret Service, the U.S. Marshals, the Border Patrol, and the Drug Enforcement Administration. The DEA position opened up first. Why do you call it a dirty business?"

"I didn't mean that the way it sounded," Henry said. "I realize it's essential work that has to be done. It's just that it throws you into contact with so many undesirables—these dealers and pushers and

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mules you're always talking about. Young fellow like you—nice-looking, educated, good personality—why, you could be climbing the corporate ladder in just about any field you chose."

"Sure, I could," Lew admitted immodestly. "But what would I get out of it? If I was in electronics or real estate or retail marketing, what would I bring home with me at the end of the day? That I helped design a new computer, or sold the land for a new shopping center, or closed a sale of winter sportswear with a big department-store chain? That's not enough for me, Henry." He leaned forward to make a point. "Knowing I busted some creep who was involved in peddling heroin to high-school kids—now that's *something*. I can get a good night's sleep on that, Henry." He sat back and smiled a little sheepishly. "Make any sense to you? Or do I sound like Robert Stack in an old *Untouchables* episode?"

"Of course it makes sense," Henry assured him. "I just wondered, that's all."

"Well, now you know. I'm dedicated to doing as much as I can to stop drug traffic."

"Now I know," Henry said. "Here, have some more ice cream."

On Tuesday they were both back on the job.

"I'll work with the catering people today," Lew said.

Henry nodded. A half grin played at his lips. "Don't let me catch you swiping any steaks. You don't have enough seniority yet."

The catering operation seemed as if it should have been complex but it was actually very simple. In a frozen-food locker deep in the understructure of the big airport complex, the franchised caterers kept thousands of packaged meals, very much like the frozen TV dinners sold in supermarkets. Those meals were internationally coded as to their contents—RG meaning a regular meal, KS a Kosher meal, MO a Moslem meal, NS a low-sodium meal, VG a vegetarian meal, SPD a special diabetic meal, SPLC a special low cholesterol, SPLO a special low calorie, and so on, all the way down to meals that were gluten-free, meals for hypoglycemic passengers, even meals for Hindus. The packages were stacked in sections for breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and three snack times—morning, afternoon, and night. They were then sub-categorized into first class, coach, and economy. A computer terminal in the caterer's office told them how many of each meal went onto each flight.

"It's possible to freeze heroin," Lew told Henry. "I was thinking that an extra frozen package could be put on board in Lima, left on

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the side in the plane's food compartment by one of the cabin crew, and taken off with the waste trays here."

"Could be done," Henry said. He noticed that Lew seemed on edge again. "Something wrong?"

"Five more bodies over the weekend. Four users, one dealer. Plus which, three addict friends of one of the dead users caught the pusher who sold the death snow to their friend, and they beat him to death. They're being held on homicide charges."

Henry whistled softly.

"And what's happened so far," Lew said, "is just from the first brick that came in. If another one has gotten past us since then, and still more get through before we can plug the pipeline, well—" He shrugged; the consequences were self-explanatory.

On Tuesday's flight Lew stayed with the caterers all the way—from their initial removal of the waste accumulated on the way from Lima, through the disposal of that waste in the airport's huge trash compactor, to the on-board stocking of the plane's food compartment for the LaGuardia leg. He saw nothing or no one to pique his suspicion in any way.

"Damn!" he swore, exasperated, after Fat Albert had taken off for New York. "It's on there somewhere! I know it is!"

"Maybe you'll find it Thursday," Henry said. "Here, have some coffee—"

"What's left for me to work?" Lew asked.

"Well, let's see. There's the sanitation truck that takes care of cleaning out the 13 lavatories and restocking them with toilet supplies; and there's the cockpit crew that checks the engines after every landing. That's it."

The phone rang and Henry answered it. "For you," he said.

Lew took the receiver and listened solemnly to the speaker at the other end. When he hung up, his face was ashen. "Thirteen more addicts dead," he said, almost in a whisper. "The death snow is spreading like a virus."

On Thursday Lew observed the sanitation crew, and when that operation was finished he went into the topside cockpit and watched two engineers test and measure the performance of the four turbofan engines. He saw nothing suspicious during either activity. The only thing unusual that occurred was that while he was in the cockpit the sky over the airport darkened ominously and within minutes the runways were being laced with a torrential rain. By the time

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the engineers completed their routine and the 747 was towed back to the jetway, the entire airfield was flooded with torrents of water, and visibility, even with maximum field lighting, was only a few yards.

When Lew got back to the office, Henry was on the intercom to the tower. "Where the hell did this mess come from?" he was asking.

"Moved in from the Gulf on top of twenty miles of very thick stratocumulus clouds," the tower replied in a staticky voice. "Didn't even show up on radar until it hit the coast and dumped on Galveston."

"When do you expect it to clear?"

"Coast Guard says it's got gale-force winds coming in behind it, and a hurricane developing around 84 degrees longitude, 18 latitude, just north of the Swan Islands. Looks bad for at least four hours, maybe six."

"Thanks, tower," Henry said, and switched off. "Two-eleven won't be going anywhere tonight," he told Lew. "Neither will anything else. How'd you make out?"

"Zilch."

"Think maybe you're barking up the wrong airplane?"

Lew shook his head emphatically. "It's coming in on 211. I can *feel* it."

"So what's next then?"

"Start all over again, on Saturday's flight."

"My crews are going to get suspicious," Henry warned.

"Can't help it," Lew said. "I don't have any other choice."

Henry shrugged. "You know best." He picked up his coat and newspaper. "Turn the lights off when you leave, will you? Brother, I'll bet traffic is going to be miserable tonight."

At midnight Lew Marsh was sitting in Seat 4-B in the first-class section of the 747. The plane was empty, still at the jetway, still grounded by the raging storm outside. The winds whipping across the field were full-gale force, gusting up to 55 miles an hour. From time to time the 747 trembled on its pad. Out the window Lew could see a dim, bouncing red light as its port wing vibrated up and down a few inches.

He had been sitting there four hours, a heavy-duty flashlight on the seat beside him, his holstered revolver pulled forward on his belt—four hours of waiting, thinking, speculating; four hours of darkness and rain sounds; and then at last he knew he was not

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alone. He had not heard anyone come on board; it would have been impossible for him to—the jetway hatch was open, and the aisles were carpeted.

The first sound he heard was a soft metallic *click*—someone opening a bulkhead cabinet. Then there was the sound of clothing rustling, of a shoe lightly striking a seat support, of close breathing.

When Lew was certain he knew exactly where the other person was standing, he drew his pistol and switched on the big flashlight.

The person in the beam of light was Henry Doyle.

Henry stood next to the open cabinet where the first-class section's movie projector was located. In his hand was a plastic-wrapped, brick-shaped package, of the type Lew had seen a hundred times since becoming a drug enforcement agent.

Lew held Henry in the beam as he stepped to the service area and turned on the overhead lights. The two men stared at each other in an uneasy silence.

"I knew it had to be you," Lew said at last, quietly, without rancor. "You were the only one left. I just kept hoping I was wrong."

Henry grunted softly. "You *are* wrong. I'm no dope smuggler. The stuff is brought on board in Lima by a cabin attendant named Trudy Richards. She has it in her carry-on bag. During the movie, when the lights are out, she moves it to a space underneath the projector. She leaves the plane here and the dope goes on to LaGuardia. Somebody picks it up there—I don't know who. I don't even know how long it's been going on. I found some of the stuff by accident three weeks ago when one corner of the projector base came unbolted and I had to fix it."

Lew's eyes narrowed. "You trying to tell me you're not a mule? You don't move the stuff from one place to another to keep it from being found?"

Henry shook his head. "I put it right back where I find it, just like it's never been moved," he said quietly. He paused a beat, then added, "I only keep it long enough to poison it."

Lew Marsh's eyes got wide and his lips parted incredulously. "To *what*?"

"Poison it," Henry repeated calmly. "I take it out to the parking lot and work on it in the trunk of my car. I mix rat poison in it. I think that's appropriate, don't you?"

"But—*why*—for god's sake?" Lew asked. "I mean, what made you start—"

"Remember that photograph you saw of my brother and his

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family? The pretty dark-haired girl? She was my niece. Got hooked on drugs in college. Went from a straight A student to a grade A prostitute. Ended up on a slab in the morgue. Died of exposure, malnutrition, and pneumonia complicated by her addiction. I don't think my brother and his wife will ever get over it."

"And this is your way of getting even?"

Henry shrugged. "It's as good a way as any—and better than most. How many dealers and users have you put out of commission in the last ten days?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I've eliminated 19 users and three dealers since I started this. Eliminated them *permanently*. Plus three other users who are in jail for murdering one of the dealers. That's *twenty-five* narcotics offenders off the street, Lew. And it's just the beginning."

Lew could hardly believe what he was hearing. "Henry, that—that's mass murder."

"So is peddling heroin, Lew," the older man replied. "Only that's a little more subtle, takes a little longer." Henry sat on the arm of the nearest seat. "You remember what you said Saturday night when we were having our steaks and beer? You said when you busted some creep that was involved in peddling heroin to high-school kids, you felt it was *something*. You said you could get a good night's sleep on that. Well, I feel the same way, Lew."

Henry hefted the brick of heroin in his hand. "I had to cut this stuff at home tonight because of the storm—couldn't work in the trunk of my car. I took half a cup of heroin out of this package and poured it down the sink. Then I replaced it with half a cup of rat poison. And believe me, if I put it back in that cabinet, I could go home and sleep like a baby."

Henry stood up and handed the package. "I know you've got a job to do, Lew. I'll wait in my office for you."

Lew watched Henry walk into the jetway and disappear. He looked down at the brick of dope in his hand, remembering Henry's words. *Twenty-five narcotics offenders off the street. And that's just the beginning.*

Lew's lips compressed into a grimly determined line. He stepped onto the seat and stuck the heroin securely under the movie projector. Then he closed the cabinet and hurried after his friend Henry.

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a *NEW* short story by

JACK RITCHIE

Bradley, not one of the most successful detectives in the world, had struck gold—but he reminded himself he must not get greedy and possibly kill the golden goose . . .

THE GOLDEN GOOSE

by JACK RITCHIE

The only contact I ever had with my client was by phone.

"Bradley Investigations, *Incorporated?*" he asked, emphasizing the Incorporated.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm calling from San Francisco."

San Francisco is approximately 2,000 miles from my office, as the crow flies.

He introduced himself. "My name is Jameson. James Jameson. I am an attorney representing Mr. Willard MacGregor, of MacGregor Shipping."

"Ah, yes," I said brightly, since he obviously expected me to have heard of MacGregor Shipping before.

He came to the point. "I want you to find a Mrs. Elizabeth Sterling and her son, Harold. Both of them were last known to reside in your area. I got hold of a telephone book for your city and picked your firm out of the yellow pages more or less at random. I know nothing about detective agencies.

"Mr. MacGregor is a man now well along in years and he has come to that point in his life when he is willing to forgive and forget. That is why he wants to find her and her son. And any other progeny she may have accumulated in the passing years."

"What does he want to forgive and forget?"

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"The fact that she married Franklin Sterling. Elizabeth Sterling, nee MacGregor, was Mr. MacGregor's niece. Mr. MacGregor thought that she married much beneath her. Sterling was only a bookkeeper, and a low level one at that, in Mr. MacGregor's firm. How the two of them ever met socially is a mystery. However, they did—and when she married him, Mr. MacGregor banished her from his life—also from his will. However, now that he has reached the twilight years he has had afterthoughts about the matter. Elizabeth and her son are the only blood relatives of which Mr. MacGregor is aware. He has the choice of leaving his estate to them or to charities. He now prefers the former."

Jameson sighed. "All of this—the banishment and the disinheritance—occurred thirty-five years ago. In 1947, to be exact. After the marriage, Elizabeth and her husband packed up and left San Francisco. She sent her uncle a birth announcement after Harold was born. The envelope was postmarked Milwaukee, but she provided no return address. Not that MacGregor wanted one at the time. MacGregor has had no other communication from her since. Now—about your fees?"

I hedged, being prepared to negotiate. "They vary from case to case, the effort involved, and the difficulties encountered." I paused. "And the number of operatives I might have to assign to the case."

"Well, use as many as you need. I'll send you a two-thousand-dollar retainer to get you started. Is that sufficient?"

I had struck gold and I was tempted to say no. However, one must not get greedy and possibly kill the golden goose. Instead, I said, "I'll have my operatives get to work on this immediately."

Actually, I have no operatives. I don't even have a secretary. I can't afford one. I alone am Bradley Investigations, Inc.

"The minute you find them, get in touch with me," Jameson instructed. "I'll phone every other day or so to see how you're getting along. Send me an itemized list of your expenses."

I took down his phone number and office address before he hung up.

I sat back to think. Yes indeed, this could be a long, long search. Thirty-five years ago? A lot can happen in thirty-five years.

Where would I start? Well, obviously with the year 1947.

I drove to the main telephone exchange and got permission to consult the library of old directories.

Franklin and Elizabeth Sterling did not appear in the 1947 book. Probably they had arrived in the city too late to make the edition.

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I tried 1948.

Voila! There it was. Franklin Sterling. I copied the phone number and the address.

Americans are notoriously mobile, moving, on the average, once every four years. Just how mobile were the Sterlings? I skipped ahead five years.

Franklin Sterling was still in the book. Same phone number, same address.

I tried the year 1960. Yes, Franklin Sterling still there, same residence.

I leapfrogged to 1965. No Franklin Sterling. However, a now familiar address and telephone number caught my eye. This time they appeared after the name *Elizabeth* Sterling.

What had happened? Had there been a divorce and she had gained custody of the address and phone number? Or had Franklin died?

I tried the 1970 book. Elizabeth was still there.

Her name disappeared from the 1975 book. However, once again I found the familiar address and telephone number, this time by the name Harold Sterling.

What had happened to Elizabeth? Had she died or had Harold simply decided it was time to list the number under his own name?

I went on.

Harold's name was not in the 1979 edition. I rechecked the column of Sterlings for the familiar address and telephone number. They had disappeared completely.

I pondered. Harold had been about 32 or 33 years old in 1979. Very likely he had simply moved.

Well, that was the place for me to start—his last known address. I left the telephone building and drove on to the east side, to an older tree-lined neighborhood consisting principally of duplexes and single-family units.

I parked before one of the duplexes, went up the porch stairs, and pressed the buzzer at the door to the lower apartment.

A thin, grey-haired woman answered. "Yes?"

"I'm looking for a Mrs. Elizabeth Sterling. I understand she lived here for some time. Upstairs?"

She nodded. "But you won't find her there any more. She died seven years ago. Why do you want to find her?"

There was no point in my being secretive. "She has an uncle who is very anxious to find her. I'm a private detective assigned to the search."

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I showed her my identification. Some people are impressed by private detectives. Most are not. She was at least curious. "I didn't know Elizabeth had any relatives. She never talked about any."

"She had a son, didn't she? Harold?"

"Yes. Harold. He grew up right here. A quiet kid, never caused any trouble. He was an only child, you know. The Sterlings came here back in 1947. They were the only people I had upstairs for more than thirty years. Elizabeth got to be my best friend. Her husband—that was Franklin—died around 1963 or '64. Run over by an automobile when he was crossing the street against the lights."

She lingered on the thought a moment and then continued. "Elizabeth died just seven years ago. I thought Harold might want to move then. He was alone and there are six big rooms upstairs, but he decided he'd rather stay where he grew up. He was an accountant too, just like his father—even worked for the same company. I thought of him almost like a son. Well, maybe a nephew."

"Where's Harold now? Still upstairs?"

Her eyes teared a bit. "No. He's dead too. Three years ago. Harold always walked to work—he never owned a car—and the company he worked for is only four blocks away. Well, one morning I didn't see or hear him go to work—coming down the stairs, you know? I wasn't really worried at the time because I thought it was just one of those mornings when I'd missed him somehow. But after five o'clock, one of the people Harold worked with at the company stopped by to find out what was wrong. The company had been phoning all day and they didn't get any answer.

"So we knew that something must be the matter. My husband found the spare keys for upstairs—we keep them for emergencies, you know—and we let ourselves in. And there was Harold. In bed. He must have died during the night.

"There was an autopsy because he died so young. Only thirty-one, and you could suspect foul play or suicide, though Harold never mentioned having ideas like that. But the coroner found that Harold had just died of a weak heart, like his mother."

She sighed. "The lawyer who had charge of Harold's will took care of things, like paying for the funeral out of Harold's estate. Harold left me $10,000 in his will. He always thought of me as a second mother. Well, aunt, at least. And the rest of his estate went to charities.

"Harold also left me all the furniture upstairs. Harold's clothes didn't fit my husband, so I sold them at a garage sale and gave the

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proceeds to my church. But I packed his really personal things in a box and stored it in the attic. His butterfly collection, stamp collection, and so on. One box. Maybe you could take it off my hands? That uncle, being a blood relative, might be interested."

When I got back to my office I put the cardboard carton on top of my filing cabinet, then sat down at my desk. Well, that was it. I had finished off this case in less than two hours. Not bad time for a two-thousand-dollar retainer. But did it all end there?

Not if I could help it.

I reached for some blank paper. If Jameson wanted an itemized list of expenses, he'd get one. I'd have two operatives assigned to the job. Smith and Jones would do for now. They would trace Elizabeth Sterling to her 1947 Milwaukee address, of course, but they would find that she'd moved out of the state in 1955. Where to? How about Chicago? Nice and big and anonymous. It would take Smith and Jones about a week of extensive investigation to find her address in that city. But when they did, once again they would find that she'd moved on—this time to St. Louis.

I began making a list of the expenses Smith and Jones would incur. Hotels. The good ones. Mileage in a gas guzzler. Food. They were heavy eaters of fine food. At the end of the week, when I had the list finished and typed, I would send it off to Jameson.

I thought Jameson might phone the next day, Tuesday, for a report on my progress, but he didn't.

I waited for Wednesday's mail with some expectation, since it should contain my two-thousand-dollar retainer. However, Wednesday's mail arrived and it contained no check. Jameson didn't phone either.

Thursday passed. No check, no phone call.

I waited until Friday's mail—again, no check—and then picked up the phone and dialed Jameson in San Francisco.

A woman answered the phone.

"I'd like to speak to Mr. Jameson," I said.

There was a pause at the other end of the line. "Mr. James Jameson?"

"The same."

Another pause. "Then I guess you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Mr. Jameson is dead. He was buried this morning."

I blinked. "When did he die?"

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"Monday, sir. About noon, I think. I went into his office to have him sign some letters and there he was, just slumped over his desk. He was only sixty-three."

"Who am I talking to?"

"His secretary, sir. I'm just clearing up a few things and then I suppose the firm will assign me to somebody else."

"My name is Bradley. Of Bradley Investigations, Inc. Did Mr. Jameson speak to you about me?"

She took a moment to think. "No, sir."

I hung up.

Jameson had died about noon Monday, San Francisco time. He had phoned me at eleven, his time. Which meant that he had died within the hour after hiring me. Evidently he hadn't gotten around to writing out, much less mailing, the check.

What now? What could I salvage from this?

I'd have to get in touch with MacGregor personally. I'd tell him Jameson had meant to send me a two-thousand-dollar retainer for locating the whereabouts of Elizabeth Sterling and her son and I was working diligently on the case.

Would that be enough?

I had absolutely no proof that Jameson had hired me. Would MacGregor believe me, or would he think this was some kind of confidence game, taking advantage of Jameson's death? Would he decide that just to be on the safe side he should hire his own private detective to find his niece? There was that possibility.

I sighed. No, I'd have to play my whole hand at once and come right out with the fact that I'd already traced Elizabeth Sterling and her son, Harold. I would tell MacGregor that upon receipt of the two-thousand-dollar retainer Jameson had promised me, I'd send him the information.

Suppose MacGregor balked and put another agency on the job? After all, he would reason that if I could ferret out Elizabeth and her son another detective agency could do the same. And cheaper.

Difficulties, difficulties.

I glanced about my small office. One of these days I would have to dust it again. Maybe even wash the windows.

What had I expected when I first opened nearly a dozen years ago? Adventure? Excitement? What had I gotten? Divorce cases—and even that market was drying up now that our state grants no-fault divorces. Digging up dirt in child-custody disputes—there were few of these now that the definition of moral turpitude is so elastic.

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Missing persons—well, there were still a few of those. And an occasional opportunity to act as security guard at private functions.

Not once in all the years had anyone asked me to solve a murder.

What had all this brought me? A ten-year-old car that desperately needed an overhaul job. A utility apartment in a run-down building. A capacity for boredom.

Where would I be ten years from now? Right here, I supposed. And everything would still need dusting, the windows would still be grimy.

I shook myself out of my dark mood. Back to work. I would have to get copies of Elizabeth and Harold Sterling's death certificates. What other proof would I need?

My eyes went to the box containing what was left of Harold's world. Maybe there was something in it I could use. I put it on my desk and opened it.

I found the butterfly collection. It wasn't very extensive. From the dates under the pinned butterflies, I gathered that Harold had given up adding to it while still in his teens. The same with the stamp collection.

I came across photographs and snapshots taken over the years. Elizabeth Sterling with her husband and their son.

I found Harold's wallet. No money. No driver's license, but then he hadn't owned a car. And apparently he didn't believe in credit cards either. But he did have a social-security card and library card. Some wallet photos of his mother and father.

I rummaged further and came up with some packs of cancelled checks and old copies of income-tax forms. His high-school diploma. His birth certificate.

If he were alive today, he would have been two years younger than I.

I put the birth certificate, the social-security card, the library card, and the diploma in a row on my desk. I looked at my office again. I rubbed the back of my neck.

Suppose, just *suppose,* that Bradley Investigations, Inc., actually found Harold alive and well? Suppose that Bradley Investigations, Inc., immediately packed him off to San Francisco to present himself to his great-uncle—with proof of his identity. A birth certificate, a social-security card, a few selected photographs—but none of Harold beyond the age of, say, five. And perhaps a nice substantiating letter from Bradley Investigations, Inc., to the effect that this was indeed the long lost Harold Sterling.

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Would it work?

I picked up the phone and reserved a one-way ticket to San Francisco.

That was six months ago.

Today Uncle MacGregor and I are the best of friends and constant companions. I am good for him and he is certainly good for me.

I sincerely wish him many more good years ahead. If there's one thing I'm not, it's greedy.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

MORE GRAVE TONES

by JAMES HOLDING

Here drop a tear and briefly tarry
With Henry Makepeace Richard Carey,
Who recently departed life
Stomach-stabbed with a carving knife.
When gendarmes pinned the heinous crime
On a Japanese gardener from Anaheim,
His sole defense, employed with tact,
Was pointing out one simple fact.
"Harry Carey not murder," he cried,
"Hari-kari is suicide!"

Here's what's left
Of Benny the Clamp.
He tried to mug
A karate champ.

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a *NEW* short story by

PETER LOVESEY

Mr. Pugh employed three men in his little butcher shop—Joe Wilkins, the manager, dark and good-looking, with an old-fashioned Clark Gable moustache and quick laughing eyes that had a way of involving everyone when he passed a joke with a customer; Frank Dobson, the apprentice, eighteen and useful for heavy work; and Percy Maddox, pushing seventy, who for twenty years had worked from six in the morning until seven at night, six days a week, fetching and carrying and sweeping up. But on this particular Monday morning, Percy was late . . .

A very likeable story—and a very likely classic!—from Peter Lovesey, creator of Sergeant Cribb . . .

THE BUTCHERS

by PETER LOVESEY

He had passed the weekend in the cold-store of Pugh the Butcher's. It was now Monday morning. The door was still shut. He was unconcerned. Quite early on Saturday evening he had given up beating his fists on the door and screaming for help. He had soon tired of jumping and arm-swinging to keep his circulation going. He had become increasingly drowsy as his brain had succumbed to the deprivation of oxygen. He had lain on the tiled floor below the glistening carcases and by Sunday morning he had frozen to death.

On the other side of the door, Joe Wilkins filled two mugs with instant coffee. It was still only 8:00 A.M. and the shop didn't open until 8:30. He was Mr. Pugh's shop manager, forty-four, a master butcher, dark and good-looking, with an old-fashioned Clark Gable

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moustache and quick laughing eyes that had a way of involving everyone in the shop each time he passed a joke with a customer.

The second mug was for Frank, the apprentice butcher. Frank was eighteen and useful for heavy work. He earned extra money on Saturday nights as a bouncer in Stacey's, the disco across the street. When the deliveries came from the slaughterer's, Frank would take the sides of beef on his back as if they were pieces of polystyrene. The girls from Woolworth's next door often came into the shop on their lunch hour and asked Frank for rides on his motorbike. Frank got embarrassed when Joe Wilkins teased him about it.

Frank hung up his leather jacket and put on a clean apron. Joe was already wearing his straw boater. He watched the young man struggle awkwardly with the apron-strings, tying a bow so loose it was sure to fall apart as soon as he stretched up to lift a carcase off its hook.

"Another heavy weekend, lad?"

"Not really," answered Frank, taking his coffee and slopping some on the chopping-block. "Same as usual."

"That's good to hear. Looks as if we've got a busy morning ahead of us."

Frank gave a frown.

Joe snapped his fingers. "Come on, lad, what's different this morning, or haven't you noticed yet?"

Frank looked around the shop. "Meat's not out yet."

"Right. And why not?"

"Percy isn't in."

"Right again. By jove, I was wrong about you. You ought to be on the telly with a mind as sharp as that. Why spend the rest of your life hacking pieces of meat when you could earn millions sitting in an armchair answering questions? And now for five hundred and a holiday for two in the Bahamas, Mr. Dobson. What do you think has happened to Percy?"

"Dunno," answered Frank.

"You don't know? Come on, lad. You're not trying."

"He could have fallen off his bike again."

"That's more like it," said Joe as he took his knives and cleavers from the drawer behind the counter and started sharpening them. "Get the window ready, will you?"

Frank put down his coffee and looked for the enamel trays that usually stood in the shop window.

Joe said, "You're probably right about Percy. He's too old to be in

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charge of a bike. Seven miles is a long way on a morning like this, with ice all the way up Bread and Cheese Hill and the motorists driving like lunatics. He was knocked in the ditch last week, poor old devil."

"Where does he put the trays?" asked Frank.

"Trays?"

"For the meat—in the window."

"Aren't they there then?" Joe put down his knife and went to look. "Well, I suppose he puts them away somewhere. By the time I arrive, they're always here. Have a look behind the deep-freeze cabinet. —Got 'em? Good. Blowed if I understand why he bothers to do that."

"Dust, I expect," said Frank.

"Quite right. Wipe them over with a cloth, lad. I used to wonder what Percy did with himself before we arrived in the morning. He's in by six, you know, regular. How about that? He must be up at five. Could you do that six mornings a week? And it gets no easier as you get older. He must be pushing seventy by now."

"What *does* he do before we get in?" asked Frank.

"Well, it's always spotless, isn't it?"

"I thought that was because he stays on of a night to clean up after we close."

"So he does—but there's always more dust by morning. Percy wipes all the surfaces clean. He puts out the trays, and the cuts from the cold-store. He hangs up the poultry and opens a tin of liver and checks everything against the price-list, puts out the tags and the plastic parsley and the new-laid eggs and the packets of stuffing and bread sauce. I hope you're listening, lad, because I want all those jobs done before we open."

Frank gave another frown. "You want me to do all that?"

"Who else, lad?" said Joe in a reasonable voice. "It's obvious that Percy isn't going to make it this morning, and I've got the orders to get out."

"He hasn't had a day off since I started last year," said Frank, still unable to believe his bad luck.

"He hasn't had a day off in the twenty years I've been working here. Six in the morning till seven at night, six days a week. And what for? Boy's work. He does the work you ought to be doing, lad. No one else but Percy would stand for it. Fetching and carrying and sweeping up. Do you know, he's never once complained to me or Mr. Pugh or anyone else? You've seen him bent nearly double carrying

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in the carcases. A man of his age shouldn't be doing work like that. It's exploitation, that's what it is."

"Why does he do it then? He's old enough to draw his pension."

Joe shook his head. "He wouldn't be happy with his feet up. He's spent the best years of his life working in this shop. He was here before Mr. Pugh took it over. It was Slater's in those days. —Yes, Percy can tell you some tales about the old days. It means a lot to him, working in this shop."

Frank went to the cold-store to get out the small joints left over from Saturday. The cold-store consisted of two chambers, one for the chilled meat, the other for the frozen. He opened the door of the chiller and started taking out legs of lamb. He needed to hurry to fill the trays in the window by opening time.

Joe was still sharpening knives. He continued telling Frank about the injustices heaped on Percy. "He gets no recognition for all the work he puts in. Blind loyalty, I call it, but there are some that would call it plain stupidity. Do you think Mr. Pugh appreciates what Percy does? Of course he doesn't."

"He's never here, is he?" contributed Frank, who was becoming quite skillful at fueling Joe's maledictions against their employer.

"That's a fact. To be fair to Mr. Pugh, he has to look in at the market and collect the meat from the slaughterhouse, but that shouldn't take all day. It wouldn't hurt him to show his face here more often."

Frank gave a sly grin. "It might hurt someone else."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Joe, taking offense.

"Well, you and me. We don't want the boss breathing down our necks, do we?"

Joe said in a curt tone, "Speak for yourself, boy. I'm not ashamed of my work." He put down the knife he was holding and went to the window to rearrange the tray of lamb chops Frank had just put there. "Haven't you any idea how to put meat on a tray to make it look attractive?"

"I was trying to be quick."

"You can't hurry a job like this. That's why Percy starts so early. He's an artist in his way. His windows are a picture. I wonder what's happened to him."

"He could be dead."

Joe turned to look at Frank with clear disfavor. "That's a very unpleasant suggestion."

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"It's a possibility. He's always falling off that old bike. Well, he could have been taken to hospital, anyway."

"Someone would have phoned by now."

"All right, perhaps he died in the night," persisted Frank. "He could be lying in his bed. He lives alone, doesn't he?"

"You're talking nonsense, lad."

"Can you think of anything better?"

"Any more lip from you, young man, and I'll see you get your cards. Get the chickens out—I'll attend to this."

"Do you mean the frozen birds, Mr. Wilkins?"

"The farm birds. I'll tell you if we need any frozen in a minute or two."

"Do you think we ought to phone the hospital, Mr. Wilkins, just in case something happened to Percy?"

"What good would that do?"

Frank took seven capons from the chiller and hung them on the rail above the window. "That's all there is," he told Joe. "Shall I get out some frozen ones?"

Joe shook his head. "It's Monday, isn't it? There isn't much call for poultry on a Monday."

"We'll need them for tomorrow. They need to thaw. We won't be getting any farm birds this week with Mr. Pugh on holiday."

Joe hesitated in his rearrangement of the window display. "You've got a point there, lad."

Frank waited.

"Yes," said Joe. "We shall want some frozen birds."

"Have you got the key?"

"The key?"

"There's a padlock on the freezer door."

Joe crossed the shop to take a look. It was a heavy padlock. It secured the hasp on the freezer door over an iron staple. He said, "Silly old beggar. What does he want to lock it for?"

"There's a lot of good meat in there," said Frank, in Percy's defense. "Have you got the key?"

Joe shook his head. "I reckon he takes it home with him."

Frank swore. "What are we going to do? We've got to get in there. It's not just the chickens. It's the New Zealand. We're right down on lamb."

"We'd better look for the key—he might leave it somewhere," said Joe, opening one of the drawers under the counter.

Their short search did not turn up the key.

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"I think I could force it with that old file of yours," suggested Frank.

"No, lad, you might damage the door. You don't want to get your marching orders from Mr. Pugh. I've got one of those small hacksaws in my toolbag in the car. We can use that to cut through the padlock."

A short time later he returned with the saw. He held the padlock firm while Frank started sawing through the staple.

"All this trouble because of Percy," said Frank. "I'd like to strangle the old git."

"It might not be his fault after all," said Joe. "Mr. Pugh might have given him orders to use a padlock. He's dead scared of the boss. He does exactly what he's told, and I don't blame him. I heard Mr. Pugh laying into him on Saturday night after you left to deliver those orders. It was vicious, it really was."

Frank continued sawing. "What was it about?"

"Well, you were here when Mr. Pugh walked in out of nowhere, saying he wanted to see that things were straight before he went off for his week in Majorca—that was before you left with the orders."

"He'd just picked up his tickets from the travel agent."

"Right. You'd think he'd be on top of the world, wouldn't you, just about to push off for a week in the sun? Not Mr. Pugh. He happened to catch old Percy putting away the cuts we hadn't sold."

"There's nothing wrong with that, is there?"

"No, but Percy left the door of the chiller open while he was doing it. We all do it, but Percy got caught. You should have heard Mr. Pugh go for him, ranting and raving about the cost of running a cold chamber with employees who are so idle they let the cold air out because they can't be bothered to open and close the door a few times. He really laid it on thick. He was quoting things about cubic feet of air and thermal units as if old Percy had done it deliberately."

"Almost there," said Frank. "Mind it doesn't catch your hand."

The hacksaw blade cut cleanly through the staple.

Joe said, "Good." But he was determined to finish his story. "He told Percy he was too old for the job and he ought to retire soon. Percy started pleading with him. I tell you, Frank, I was so embarrassed I didn't want to hear any more. I left them to it and went home."

"I'll bring out those frozen birds," said Frank, slipping the padlock from the hasp.

"You'd have a job to find a meaner man than Mr. Pugh," Joe

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continued as Frank swung back the door of the freezer chamber. "Going on like that at an old man who's worked here all his life, and all for the sake of a few pence more on his electricity bill when we all know he makes enough profit to have holidays in Spain. —What's the matter, lad?"

Frank had uttered a strange cry as he entered the chamber.

Joe looked in and saw him standing over the huddled, hoar-white figure of a dead man. He went closer and crouched to look at the face. It was glistening with a patina of frost.

It was the face of Mr. Pugh.

Joe placed his hand on Frank's shoulder and said, "Come away, lad. There's nothing we can do."

From somewhere Joe produced a hip flask and poured some scotch for Frank as they sat in the shop and stared at the door of the freezer.

"We'll have to call the police," said Frank.

"I'll do it presently."

"He must have been trapped in there all the weekend."

"He wouldn't have known much about it," said Joe. "He must have died inside a few hours."

"How could it have happened?"

Joe stared into space and said nothing.

"There's a handle on the inside of that door," said Frank, speaking his thoughts as they rushed through the implications. "Anyone caught in there can open the door and walk out, usually. But he couldn't get out because the padlock on the outside was on. Someone must have put it there. It must have been Percy. Why would Percy do a thing like that?"

Joe gave a shrug and kept silent.

Frank supplied his own answer: "He must have panicked when he thought he would lose his job. He'd been in fear of losing it for years. He found some way of persuading Mr. Pugh to go into the freezer and then locked him inside.

"I know what he did! He told Mr. Pugh the handle on the inside was too stiff to move and he liked to leave the door open because he was scared of being trapped. Mr. Pugh said he was making excuses and stepped inside to show how easy it was to get out." Frank began to smile. "Mr. Wilkins, I think I'm going to laugh."

The tension relaxed a little.

"I'll tell you something funnier than that," said Joe. "Why do you think Percy hasn't come in this morning?"

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"Well, it's obvious. He knew we'd open that door and find the body."

"Yes, but where do you think he is?"

Frank frowned and shook his head. "At home?"

Joe grinned and said, "Majorca."

"No!" Frank rocked with laughter. "The crafty old beggar!"

"When Mr. Pugh came in on Saturday he had a large brown envelope containing his travel tickets."

"I remember. I saw it. He put it on the counter by the cash register."

"Well, it isn't there now, is it?"

Frank said, "You can't help admiring the old man. He's probably sitting on the hotel terrace at this minute, ordering his breakfast and thinking of you and me finding Mr. Pugh in the freezer."

"I'd better phone the police," said Joe, getting up.

"You know, if it wasn't for that padlock on the door no one would suspect what happened," said Frank. "Mr. Pugh might have just felt ill and fainted in there. They'd call it misadventure, or something."

"And Percy would get away with it," said Joe reflectively. "It isn't as if he's a vicious murderer. He's no danger to anyone else."

"I could get rid of it," offered Frank. "I could put it in the pannier on my bike and get rid of it lunchtime."

"We'd have to stick to the same story," said Joe. "We just opened the door and found him lying there."

"It's the truth," said Frank. "We don't need to say a word about the padlock. Shall we do it? Poor old Percy—he hasn't had many breaks."

"All right," confirmed Joe. "We'll do it."

After they had shaken hands, he picked up the phone and called the police. Frank took the padlock to his motorbike in the yard at the back of the shop and secreted it under the toolbag in the pannier.

A squad car drew up outside the shop within five minutes of Joe's call. A bearded sergeant and a constable came in and Joe opened the freezer chamber and showed them Mr. Pugh's body. Frank described how he had found it, omitting to mention the padlock. Joe confirmed Frank's statement.

"So it looks as if the body's been lying in there since you closed on Saturday," said the sergeant after they had withdrawn to the warmer air of the shop. "You say that Mr. Pugh looked in late in the afternoon. What did he want?"

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"He was just making sure everything was in order before he went on holiday," said Joe.

"He was off to Majorca for a week," added Frank.

"Lucky man," put in the constable.

The sergeant gave him a withering look. "Was Mr. Pugh in good health?" he asked Joe.

"I thought he looked rather off-color," answered Joe. "He drove himself hard, you know."

"He needed the holiday," said Frank, quick to see the point of what Joe was suggesting.

"Well, he didn't get it," said the sergeant. "He must have collapsed. Heart, I expect. The doctor will tell us. There's an ambulance on the way. I suggest you keep the shop closed for a couple of hours. I shall want statements from both of you. Was there anyone else working here on Saturday?"

"Only Percy—Mr. Maddox," answered Joe. "He isn't in this morning. I believe he was going to ask Mr. Pugh for a few days off."

"I see. We'll want a statement from him. Have you got his address?"

"He told me he was hoping to go away," said Joe.

"We'll catch up with him later then. Which of you was the last to leave on Saturday?"

"That was Percy," said Joe.

"He stays behind to clear up," explained Frank.

"He puts things away, you mean?"

"That's right," said Joe. "He's getting on a bit. He's worked here for years. A bit slow now, but he likes to be useful. He puts everything away at the end of the day."

"In the freezer?"

Joe shook his head. "We don't refreeze meat. It has to be put in the chiller at the end of the day."

"So he wouldn't have opened the freezer door?"

"It's unlikely," said Joe. "If he had, he'd have found Mr. Pugh, wouldn't he?"

They took a statement from Frank. He said nothing to incriminate Percy. He simply explained how he had seen Mr. Pugh come into the shop late on Saturday afternoon shortly before he, Frank, had left to deliver the orders. As for this morning, he had opened the freezer door and found Mr. Pugh dead on the floor. The constable read the statement back and Frank signed it. "Would you like some coffee and a fresh doughnut?" he asked the policemen. "We always

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have a doughnut in the morning. It's my job to collect them from Jonquil's. I go on my bike and they're still warm when I get back."

"I like the sound of that," said the sergeant, putting his hand in his pocket. "How much are they?"

Frank felt an exhilarating sense of release as he wheeled his motorcycle into the street and started the engine. He rode up the hill toward the baker's, stopping a few yards short, by the place where the front of the delicatessen was being renovated. Outside was a builder's skip containing old wood and masonry. Frank took the padlock from his basket and dropped it unobtrusively into the skip. He collected the bag of doughnuts from the baker's and drove back to the shop.

An ambulance had drawn up outside. As Frank approached, one of the attendants was closing the rear door. The man walked round the side of the vehicle and got in. It moved away. The few bystanders who had collected outside the shop moved on.

When Frank went in, Joe had already made the coffee. He was talking to the police about football.

"We should have gone by now," the sergeant told Frank. "We've got both your statements and the body's been collected, but we didn't want to miss those doughnuts."

Frank handed them around.

"Still warm," said the sergeant. "I hope you observed the speed limit, lad."

Frank smiled.

The police finished their coffee and doughnuts and left the shop.

Frank heaved a huge breath of relief.

Joe took out his handkerchief and mopped his forehead. "Did you get rid of it?"

Frank nodded.

"Well done," said Joe. "Well done, Frank."

"I reckon old Percy owes us both a beer after that," said Frank.

"It's worth more than that," said Joe.

"We couldn't have turned him in," said Frank.

They opened the shop. Customers who had seen the shop closed earlier now returned in force. They all wanted to know what the police had been doing here and whether it was a body that the ambulance men had collected. Joe and Frank explained that they were unable to comment. The inquiries persisted and the queue got longer.

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"If you ask me," one woman notorious for voicing her opinions said, "it was that old boy who sweeps the floor. He was far too old to be working in a shop."

"If you mean Percy Maddox, you're wrong," said the woman next in line. "There's nothing wrong with Percy. There he is coming up the street on his bike."

Joe dropped the cleaver he was using and went to the window. He was joined by Frank, who gave a low whistle of amazement.

"Crazy old man," said Joe angrily. "What does he think he's up to? He ought to be in Spain."

They watched through the window as Percy came to a halt outside the shop, dismounted, removed his cycle-clips, and wheeled his bicycle up the side passage. A moment later he appeared in the shop, a slight, bald-headed, worried-looking man in a faded grey suit. He picked his apron off the hook and started getting into it. "Morning, ladies," he said to the queue, then turned to Joe and said, "Morning, Joe. Shall I tidy up the window? It's a bit of a mess."

Joe said, "What are you doing, coming in here?"

"Sorry I'm late," said Percy. "The police kept me waiting."

"You've been to the police?" said Joe in a shrill voice. "What did you tell them?"

Frank said, "Listen, I've just thought of something. I'd better go and fetch it." He started untying his apron.

But he was slower than Joe, who was already out of his. He said, "You stay. I'll go."

While Frank was saying, "But you don't know where I put it," Joe was round the counter and out to the street.

He didn't get far. Apparently from nowhere, two policemen grabbed him. A squad car drew up and he was bundled into the back. It drove away, its blue light flashing.

"Who's next?" said Percy, who had taken Joe's place behind the counter.

An hour or so later, when there was no queue left and Frank and Percy had the shop to themselves, Frank said, "What's going to happen to Joe?"

"Plenty of questions, I should think," answered Percy. "You know about Mr. Pugh being found dead, don't you?"

"I was the one who found him."

"Well, Joe must have murdered him."

"Joe? We thought it was you."

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Percy blinked. "Me, son?"

"When you didn't come in this morning, we thought you must have bunked off to Spain with that ticket Mr. Pugh left on the counter."

"But why should I want to kill Mr. Pugh after all these years?"

"Well, because of the bad time he gave you—all those long hours without a word of thanks. Exploitation, Joe called it."

"Did he, by George," said Percy with a smile.

"He said there was a bit of a scene on Saturday because you left the freezer door open. He said he felt so embarrassed he cleared off home while Mr. Pugh was still laying into you."

Percy shook his head. "Son, that isn't true. I left before Joe on Friday. Mr. Pugh had told me it might be better if I wasn't around while he did some stocktaking with Joe. We had our suspicions about Joe, you see. The books weren't right. There were big discrepancies. Mr. Pugh and I decided to check things carefully for a week and confront him with the evidence on Saturday after we closed."

Frank's eyes widened.

"Mr. Pugh and *you?*"

"Yes. You weren't to know this, and nor was Joe, but Mr. Pugh made me a partner last year, after I'd done fifty years in the shop. Nice of him, wasn't it? I told him I wouldn't ever make a manager, and I certainly didn't want to upset Joe, so we agreed to keep the partnership a secret and I carried on the same as ever, with the work I know best. But as things have turned out, with me the surviving partner, I can't keep it a secret any longer, can I? It's my shop now. I'm the boss."

Frank was shaking his head, trying to understand. "So did you put the police onto Joe?"

Percy nodded. "But I didn't mean to. I didn't know what had happened. On Sunday morning Joe drove over to see me. He told me Mr. Pugh had changed his mind about going to Spain because the auditors were coming to look at the books and he'd asked Joe to offer the ticket to me. I believed him. I thought he wanted me out of the way to spare me any unpleasantness."

"When it was really Joe who wanted you out of the way," said Frank. He recollected the events of the morning, the way Joe had tricked him into covering up the crime out of sympathy for Percy, when in reality Percy was innocent. The trick had almost succeeded too. The police had gone away convinced Mr. Pugh had died by

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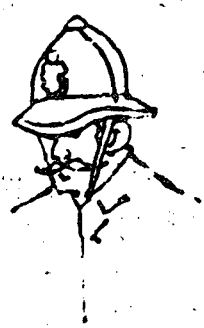
misadventure. They hadn't suspected murder, and they certainly hadn't suspected Joe of committing it. But now he was under arrest.

"Well, if you weren't suspicious of Joe," Frank said to Percy, "why aren't you in Spain? What made you go to the police?"

Percy picked up Joe's straw boater.

"You know how it is with me, son. I haven't had a holiday in years, let alone a holiday abroad. I haven't got a passport. I dropped in at the police station to ask where I can get one, and—" He handed the boater to Frank. "I need a new manager now, don't I?"



DETECTIVERSE

THE BALLAD OF DIAMOND JIM

by CARRELL I. RAINEY

Diamond Jim, he stole a pin,
A gold chain, and a locket,
Put them in a paper bag
And dropped it in his pocket.

That night in town, his house burned down.
(Don't moralize or mock it.)
The jewelry's in his fireproof safe,
It's just too hot to hock it.

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Jean didn't know when she began to be afraid. Perhaps it was something in the blond man's smile. Perhaps it was only that there were no other vehicles in sight and it was nearly dusk . . .

FACE AT THE WINDOW

by MARGARET LACEY

Jean has had a good day upstate with her daughter, but has stayed too long talking with her and the children. It is nearly dusk and the small paved highway which is the shortest route home seems very lonely. Incredibly, her dependable Mercedes, destined never to grow old, blows a tire. She feels the steering wheel leap in her hands, but her speed has not been great and she is able to guide the car safely to the shoulder.

She gets out to look. It is the right front tire. She has never changed a tire. Her husband always did it, but he's not here to do so now. He has gone far out of her reach, dead at forty-five of his first and only heart attack. Briefly, she is visited by a pang of rage and betrayal that he should leave her to face the little crises of life alone. Then, as always, the larger grief overtakes her: the pervasive need for his presence in every corner of her life. But there is no time now to indulge it.

There is a book in the glove compartment that gives simple and precise directions. She has only to proceed step by step and to watch how things come apart in order to be able to put them back together again. She is heading in the direction of the trunk when a van pulls up beside her and a large blond man leans from the driver's seat to smile at her through the passenger window.

"Having some trouble?"

"Yes, I've got a flat. I was just about to try fixing it."

"I'll do it for you. Glad to."

Gratefully she hands him the keys and prepares to watch him closely so as to know what to do next time.

She doesn't know when she begins to be afraid. Perhaps there is something in his smile. Perhaps it is only that there are no other

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vehicles in sight. He has finished raising the corner of the car on the jack in silence, but now he begins to speak:

"It's lucky I happened by. A pretty lady like yourself shouldn't have to get all dirty changing a tire." And then: "Lucky for both of us, eh?"

Without conscious thought she says: "I guess I'll wait in the car." She goes around to the driver's side, climbs in, and depresses all four lock buttons.

"Hey, don't do that!" he yells. "It's not safe when it's up on the jack!"

She opens the window a crack. "I'm sorry," she says faintly.

He finishes the job quickly and lets the corner of the car settle to the ground. When he has stowed the flat and the tools in the trunk he comes around to the driver's side and stands dangling her keys from one finger. "Here's your keys, lady."

"Thank you so much. Just push them through the window. May I pay you?"

There is a silence. "Sure," he grins.

A little surprised, she says: "I've never had a tire changed before. Would five dollars be all right?"

"Oh, no money needs to change hands."

She finds she is sweating. "But I want to give you something for your trouble."

"Well, I figure if you think I done you a favor, you might do me one."

Monstrous possibilities begin to live in his tone and his smile, but she begins a mechanical search through her bag for an appropriate amount.

"Here, take ten dollars."

He ignores the bill. "I got the back of the van fixed up real nice. How about joinin' me there for a little spell?"

"No, thank you. I'm not interested. Here. And would you give me the keys, please?"

"Okay. Come and take 'em."

She tries to remember whether she has another set of keys in the car. She knows there is something about a set attached to a powerful magnet. But it is not going to be any help—it comes back to her with a sick certainty that the extra set is located somewhere under the front bumper so it can always be reached from the outside.

Her mind races. Someone is bound to come along. All she has to

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do is wait him out. She marvels now at the presence of mind that allowed her to gain the safety of the car.

The man closes her keys into his big dirty hand.

"I think we'll just wait till it gets a little darker," he says. "I'm goin' to take a little nap so I'll be ready when you are. Just come and knock on the back of the van whenever you want your keys." He ambles to the van and opens the double doors to reveal a custom-built interior. He makes a wide gesture of invitation, then shrugs and climbs in, pulling the doors together behind him. She isn't able to tell whether he has latched them.

She sits for many minutes, stiff with tension, waiting for the sound of a car, but nothing comes. She knows there is a small town two miles or so south, but its people and its lights are as remote from her now as if they were a thousand miles away. She knows there is a way to start cars by connecting wires under the dashboard and she resolves to learn how from a mechanic at her garage as soon as she gets home.

She again tries to picture the exact location of the magnetized second key. It has been at least five years since Alan showed it to her, as a kind of afterthought, the day she started the long drive to Ohio to see her mother for the last time. She thinks it might be a hand's length under the right front fender—or is it the left? She wills herself into a kind of desperate trance.

At last her subconscious does its work and with a sob of relief she pictures a scene in which she and Alan are kneeling on the grass verge in front of the house while his fingers guide hers to a spot on the underside of the right front fender.

In her mind she choreographs all the moves needed to reach the keys—provided they are still there—and be locked back inside the car before the man can reach her. She is not going to be able to do it: her body will refuse to obey her. And yet she finds herself at the passenger door with the lock lifted and her hand clenched on the handle. She eases it open, watching the line that bisects the double doors of the van. Has he latched them for his nap, or is he watching her? She finds herself standing beside the open door, every muscle prepared to move her either forward or back, and then she begins to feel her way along the fender, her eyes fixed on the van.

There is a blur of movement. Without conscious thought she finds herself back under the steering wheel with the far door safely locked. He is at the window, leaning down to look at her.

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"Did you really think I was going to sleep?" he asks her cheerfully. "I saw you comin'. What's the matter? Change your mind?"

And now the car no longer seems invulnerable. He pulls her keys from his pocket and runs around the front of the car to open the passenger lock. But the white bloodless thing she has become flies across the seat to put the weight of both hands on the lock button. Her pressure on the lock renders the keys inoperable and in spite of the cold and the numbness she thinks she can keep it up indefinitely.

She says a prayer of thanks to her children for a game they used to play. She thinks it was started by Paul, the middle one: lively and inventive. He used to rush ahead of her into the car and lock all the doors, because he had discovered that even an eight-year-old's small hands could provide enough pressure to defeat an adult with the keys. For a moment she sees his face behind her eyes. It is suffused with an impish delight. "Play the game, Mom!" he would shout, and for a short time she would, racing from lock to lock, though never fast enough.

The vision fades into the fleshy features of her present nightmare. The man's face is five inches from her own—she sees beads of sweat on his forehead, large pores on his nose, pale-blue eyes, a black front tooth. His breath clouds a small circle on the window.

Suddenly he abandons his effort on the right side and streaks around to the left. She blacks out for a little, for he is at the driver's window before she is alert enough to hurl herself across the seat and throw all her weight behind her hands on the button. She begins to wonder how long she is actually going to be able to keep it up. Forever, she tells herself, forever. She tries not to sob.

She notices then how dark it is, and an old nightmare mingles with the new. A face at the window: this has always been her most common fantasy of fear. All night, until somebody comes, she will see the man's face at one or another of her windows, looming and fading. She begins to descend into despair.

He puts the keys in his pocket and goes back to the van. When he turns back toward her he has a crowbar in his hand. He comes and puts his lips close to the top of the closed window.

"I sure do hate to hurt this pretty car, but I'll pry a door open if I have to. It'll save you a lot on repair bills later if you'll just open the door for me," he says. "Think about it."

She measures the depth of her hopelessness by the fact that she

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does in fact begin to think about it. Strangely, he gives her a little time. He steps away from the car.

"I won't hurt you," he assures her. "You'll be on your way in half an hour. Honest. Cross my heart." He grins at her.

She can no longer see his face clearly. Her breath comes and goes in a whine, a soft keening. She decides to rummage in the glove compartment for a weapon and finds a hammer and a screwdriver. Then, clutching them, one in each hand, she sits, hearing his laughter.

She thinks: I must move very fast. I must aim for the eye, or the middle of his forehead, or his right temple. If I don't he'll use these on me. I have to do it before he takes me seriously. I'm going to have to kill him.

And then, incredibly, there is light around his head. A car is coming! They both turn to look. Fascinated, she watches the twin lights grow larger, wills them not to turn into a driveway or a side road. Then she remembers her own headlights and begins frantically to flick them on and off. She presses on the horn. The man runs to the front of the car and swings at the nearest set of headlights, shattering them. By this time the second vehicle is almost upon them and in his frustration he makes the mistake of taking time to smash the other set of headlights. Jean launches herself through the driver's door and stands in the glare of the other car's lights as it slows to a stop. She doesn't let herself think about who the driver might be.

The vehicle turns out to be a pickup, which sits idling, slewed halfway across the road.

"What the hell, lady?"

She hears something hit the pavement and looks down. The hammer and screwdriver have fallen from her grasp. But her still and aching fingers stay curled around the memory of the handles.

The driver of the pickup is a grizzled man with—presumably—his wife and family. The truckbed holds several children and a dog. All of them look at her with a mixture of anxiety and irritation. She tries to speak, but the words come out in gasps as though she has fallen from a height.

"He—he—wanted—" She hears her tormenter take off in his van with a roar of the motor and a squeal of tires.

The man and his wife have gotten reluctantly out of the cab and stand looking at her.

"I'm from Ithaca," she tells them. "I had a flat tire. He changed

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it for me and then he threatened me. I got into my car and locked the doors, but he—"

"I saw the crowbar," the man says briefly. "I saw him break your headlights."

"Yes, and he's taken my keys. But I think there's another pair here somewhere." He produces a strong flashlight and they find the extra keys, exactly as she has envisioned them, encrusted to the inner side of the right front fender. He has her follow him slowly, in darkness, to the nearest open service station, which turns out to be the one just off the Interstate. After conferring with her rescuer, the attendant looks at her intently, then replaces the headlights in total silence.

Jean stands far away from him, beside the door of the pickup. Inside, the woman sits impassively, looking through the windshield, offering neither small talk nor consolation. Jean wants to climb in beside her, but she doesn't dare. She hasn't even touched the fingers of the man from the van but she feels tainted and she imagines that the hard-faced countrywoman is holding herself aloof so as to escape exposure to that taint.

When the job is done, Jean pays the attendant and then offers the driver of the pickup the same ten dollars she tried to give the man from the van. He takes it, glances at her sideways, and gets back behind the wheel of his truck. As it pulls away, she sees the silent faces of the children and the dog looking back at her.

She takes the long way home on the Interstate, comforted by every car she passes, immensely thankful for the lighted windows on her street. Once inside the garage, she locks its door and proceeds to search the house, room by room, closet by closet, armed with a poker from the cold fireplace in the living room. There is no one in the house; she is safe. But again, she is briefly assailed by an irrational rage againt her dead husband. Only now does she begin to realize the extent of her exhaustion.

But she does not expect to be able to sleep. There is nothing to fear now, yet the fear remains, perhaps never to leave her. She thinks about her children, all of them miles away in the midst of their own lives, and wishes desperately for a friendly presence in the house. She can't bear to call the police. She knows what they would say. Would they laugh at her, sound and healthy, locked behind the doors of her house? She knows they wouldn't, but she holds back, constrained by inhibitions she is not willing to put into words.

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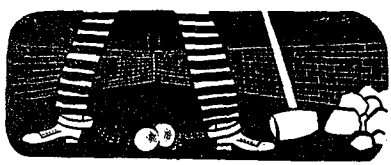
She makes another tour of the house, pulling all the shades down and making sure the locks are secure. Then she stretches out on the sofa near the phone with the most comforting book she can find, a volume of James Herriot. Unexpectedly, she sleeps.

Sometime in the night she awakens in her lighted living room with the image of a nightmare projected before her onto the white wall. There is no sound in the house. But clearly in her mind she pictures the set of keys the man has taken away with him in his van. With the keys on the ring there hangs a little silver dogtag on which her name and address are beautifully engraved. One of the children gave it to her for Christmas years ago. It was a fine idea because it meant that your keys would always find their way back to you.

Jean sits in her lighted living room with her hand on the phone, not reading, waiting for her keys to come home.



DETECTIVERSE

THE GREAT ESCAPE

by M. EDWARD HOLDEN

For six long years he chipped away,
And burrowed like a mole,
Till finally he broke out—free!
The day of his parole.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

AWARDS TIME: At its annual Edgar Awards Dinner on May 7th, the Mystery Writers of America presented its Grand Master Award to Julian Symons, famed not only as a novelist and short-story writer but also as a scholar and critic of the mystery field. Among this year's Edgar winners were: Best Novel—William Bayer, *Peregrine* (Congdon & Lattès/St. Martin's Press); Best First Novel—Stuart Woods, *Chiefs* (Norton); Best Paperback Novel—L. A. Morse, *The Old Dick* (Avon).

Of special interest to readers of this magazine were the Edgar for best mystery short story published in 1981 awarded to Jack Ritchie for "The Absence of Emily" (*EQMM,* January 28, 1981) and the critical/biographical Edgar to my fellow columnist Jon L. Breen for *What About Murder?* (Scarecrow Press).

In London on May 6th, the Crime Writers Association presented its Gold Dagger Award to Martin Cruz Smith for *Gorky Park* (Collins; U.S. edition, Random House). Other awards: Silver Dagger—Colin Dexter, *The Dead of Jericho* (Macmillan); John Creasey Award for First Novel—James Leigh, *The Ludi Victor* (Bodley Head); Nonfiction Gold Dagger—Jacobo Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number* (Weidenfeld & Nicholson; U.S. edition, Alfred A. Knopf).

PARODIES: Speaking of Edgar-winner Jon L. Breen, he has just published the first collection of his mystery parodies and pastiches, *Hair of the Sleuthhound,* containing twenty-two stories that poke gentle fun at authors as popular and varied as Agatha Christie, John Dickson Carr, Ellery Queen, Dashiell Hammett, Ed McBain, and Isaac Asimov. Most of these first appeared in *EQMM,* though four are from other magazines and two are published for the first time.

Even readers not usually attracted to parodies should enjoy Breen's work because he has a keen eye for each author's strengths and weaknesses, and provides some very clever plots. In fact, a number of these stories are clever enough to have been written and published as "straight" mysteries. Breen introduces each story with some knowledgeable notes about the author being parodied and several of the authors themselves offer brief comments at the end. The result is one

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of the best books of parodies I've read. It's available at $12.50 from Scarecrow Press, P.O. Box 656, Metuchen, NJ 08840.

NOTABLE REPRINTS: The past few months have been especially notable for excellent reprints. Atheneum has reprinted Eric Ambler's *The Levanter* (1972) and *Doctor Frigo* (1974), generally considered the best of his later novels. The latter, especially, has been highly praised by Julian Symons. They're available in trade paperback editions at $7.95 each.

Bantam Books is reprinting several of Carter Dickson's Sir Henry Merrivale novels, including *The White Priory Murders* (1934), *Death in Five Boxes* (1938), and *The Skeleton in the Clock* (1948). Raven House has reprinted Brett Halliday's *Dividend on Death* (1939), the first Mike Shayne novel. And Dutton is celebrating the James Joyce Centenary with a hardcover reissue of Amanda Cross's second novel, *The James Joyce Murder* (1967), priced at $10.25.

ALEXANDER RISK: Author Don McGregor and artist Tom Sutton have teamed up to produce a new mystery serial, *Alexander Risk*, which began running in the Spring issue of *Fantasy Illustrated.* Risk is a detective who looks and dresses like Sherlock Holmes, but insists on his own identity, and his first case is titled "The Hound of Hell Theory." As with McGregor's other efforts, this is far more than a comic strip, and the illustrations by Sutton carry a fine flavor of the 1943 setting in and around New York. The first episode ends with a real cliffhanger and we'll be watching for more.

MYSTERY TOUR: The Los Angeles bookshop *Scene of the Crime* is organizing its third international mystery tour, leaving for Europe on Agatha Christie's birthday, September 15th. The fifteen-day tour includes visits to Bath, London, Paris, Venice, and Lake Como, with a night on the restored *Orient Express.* Details from *Scene of the Crime*, 13636 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks, CA 91423.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: September will see publication of *The Murder Mystique,* an anthology of new essays by well known mystery writers and editors. The eleven contributors include Ken Follett, Hillary Waugh, Thomas Chastain, and Eleanor Sullivan. It's edited by Lucy Freeman as part of Frederick Ungar's "Recognitions" series, under the general editorship of Bruce Cassiday.

Coming from Raven House in July are four more new mysteries: *Art for Keeps* by C. Burke Block, *Burden of Proof* by Mary Challis, *Top Level Death* by Hugh Zachary, and a new private-eye novel from Hillary Waugh, *The Doria Rafe Case.*

Avon Books will publish another themed mystery anthology this fall: *Show Business Is Murder,* edited by Isaac Asimov, Carol-Lynn Waugh, and Martin H. Greenberg. Just about every phase of show business is represented, including all-night radio talk shows.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Deathtrap is an unpublished play sent to burnt-out dramatist Sidney Bruhl by one of his former seminar students. Bruhl, at one time Broadway's King of the Melodramas, knows a hit play when he reads it (at least someone else's). And this is a play to kill for. It is "a thriller. In two acts. One set. Five characters. There's a juicy murder in Act One, terror in Act Two, an ironic and astonishing resolution, good dialogue, and laughs in all the right places." The play is bound to earn a million—not counting the *Deathtrap* T-shirts.

It is Bruhl's desperate plan—he himself having recently written a string of failures—to invite this young man to his East Hampton home (built around a centuries-old windmill, the study walls displaying a bizarre collection of ancient murder weapons and mystery props—maces, scimitars, Houdini's handcuffs, a spike-imbedded chain from the Crusades) and there to kill him, and to pass *Deathtrap* off as his own creation.

The still-dashing Michael Caine (*The Ipcress File, Sleuth, Dressed to Kill*) plays Sidney Bruhl in the screen version of Ira Levin's astonishingly successful play, with Dyan Cannon as the flighty invalid wife he pulls into a murder conspiracy. Christopher Reeve is the ex-student with a sure-fire hit. Even before he walks into Bruhl's parlor, the famed psychic Helga Ten Dorp (Irene Worth), now visiting in the neighborhood, senses hurt and doom ahead in the house.

"You know there will be a murder, perhaps several," says director Sidney Lumet. Bruhl's weapons collection contains "enough implements of torture and death to outfit The Tower of London. But who will do what to whom and with which keeps shifting." This is not a conventional mystery play wherein a Scotland Yard inspector at the end gathers the suspects, solves the puzzle, and tells us the butler did it. *Deathtrap* has neither inspector nor butler. In this play, says Lumet, the audience is the detective.

Having directed the closeted jury deliberations of *Twelve Angry Men* and claustrophobic murder aboard the *Orient Express*, Lumet is no stranger to confined spaces. Except for adding touches to the very beginning and ending of Ira Levin's stageplay, Lumet has presented a very straightforward (if somewhat less subtle) screen version, without tampering with or excessively "opening up" the drama—bringing to mind other constricted one-act plays which have made a successful transition, one way or another, to the movies.

Old-dark-house mystery plays such as *The Cat and the Canary* and *Dracula*, although restricted to a single eerie mansion, set their scenes in two or even three different rooms and therefore should not concern us. Trial dramas have always made good movies. The late Ayn Rand's *Night of January 16th* had an unusual stage gimmick—at each performance members of the audience would

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become 13 jurors in the courtroom-set to decide the outcome of the complex case. It could not, however, be transferred to the screen, so instead the movie went out of the courtroom to explore what led up to the trial.

Arsenic and Old Lace, in its screen version, keeps mostly to its quaint Brooklyn house setting, and one must note that the island home of U. N. Owen, at which so many murders happen in *And Then There Were None,* was in its stage inspiration (called on Broadway *Ten Little Indians*) a one-set play. Except for a new beginning involving an Italian honeymoon, nearly all of *Gaslight* repeats the fine Victorian atmosphere and confines of its single-set stage source, *Angel Street.*

In more recent years, Frederick Knott's *Dial M for Murder* happened on stage in just one set; Alfred Hitchcock did not take the story elsewhere too often. The play's engulfing details and murder scene were heightened with 3-D. Billy Wilder's adaptation of *Witness for the Prosecution,* essentially a two-set play—lawyer's chambers and a courtroom—concentrated on his huge Old Bailey reconstruction, but did take the drama into flashbacks—to postwar Berlin, for instance, to show off Marlene Dietrich's celebrated legs.

Maxwell Anderson's long-running play about a murderous child, *The Bad Seed,* takes place in a single living room, but its screen version moves about a bit, expecially to the basement where she dispatches one of her victims. Knott's *Wait Until Dark* also is a living-room thriller, and the movie based on it largely stays there too, except for brief excursions to the park outside.

Anthony Shaffer's brilliant *Sleuth,* with one set and modest cast, stayed mostly within its stage confines when Joseph L. Mankiewicz brought it to the screen, a cosy cat-and-mouse drama about a mystery writer who leads his wife's lover into a diabolical trap. There the sprawling single set (cluttered with intriguing games) worked quite well. It doesn't always. *Child's Play,* the well received psychological drama about murders in a religious boy's school, on Broadway not only a one-set but a one-act play, did not win audiences when it was carefully filmed. Indeed, even *Sleuth* was not a financial blockbuster.

Now *Sleuth*'s star, Michael Caine, is in another one-set mystery movie, and *Deathtrap,* like its predecessors, has to be both clever and surprising to hold its audience in essentially that one locale. Playgoers already know that Ira Levin's creation is very clever indeed, that it has, as Lumet says, "more twists than the Grand Corniche," a thriller ride that on-screen is just as breathless.

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"Q"

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INTERVIEW: JANWILLEM VAN DE WETERING (1)

This is the first part of an interview that will be concluded in the next issue.

EQMN: Your stories and novels read very quickly and easily. Do they write that way?

DE WETERING: There's no average. I have written books in two weeks. Most take up to three months. *The Butterfly Hunter* took almost nine months. But the trouble is, I write them twice—first in English (in most cases), then in Dutch. Usually the Dutch version gives me more insight into the English draft, which then has to be rewritten.

There were no easy births, except *Hugh Pine,* the kiddies' book about a porcupine living in the Maine woods. I wrote it in a day. But then I rewrote it at least twelve times, so in the end it probably took months.

Then there is always the trouble with editors who know better. They usually do come up with excellent corrections, which means rewriting entire chapters and changing other chapters. Having two sets of editors, U.S. and Dutch, also delays, but it perfects the final product.

EQMN: What is your feeling about editors in general?

DE WETERING: Some of them are geniuses but some of them are lulus. And as I can't get around them, I have to flatter them—which makes a lulu out of me.

EQMN: But writing for you is basically what—a pleasure or a pain?

DE WETERING: Pleasure, of course. No pain really. I really want to write, although I hope I won't want to write forever. There must be other ways to use time creatively. Perhaps ultimately it will be a waste of time trying to be creative and, in the end, there should be either no time at all or a final proper insight into what time really is.

EQMN: What are the origins of De Gier and Grijpstra?

DE WETERING: They're based on real characters. De Gier is what I would have liked to be when I was a cop in Amsterdam and Grijpstra is a joined figure of many well meaning, frustrated, elderly, and functional noncommissioned officers I have known.

EQMN: You've traveled widely.

DE WETERING: I've lived in Holland, England, Japan, South Africa, Colombia, Peru, Australia, and the U.S. and have traveled through other parts of the world. The U.S., I assure you, is best, and it's a good thing I came here last or I would never have gone anywhere else. The only place I badly want to visit is New Guinea, where the Papuans live. Their art attracts me and I would love to see their country and what they do with it. Maybe I'll have the chance to make a trip there before it's all over—with me or with them.

EQMN: Which brings us to your sense of humor and your easy relatability.

DE WETERING: Do I have a sense of humor? You said it, not me. My easy relatability—again your term—must, if indeed I have it, be due to traveling and group effort under adverse circumstances. If you

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can't join them, you can always try to lick them.

Relatability is a Dutch characteristic—according to our own history books, which are slanted to enlarge our egos. According to this theory we became adaptable because we had to. There was a sea on the one side and enemies on the other.

EQMN: You're a sophisticated and civilized man—

DE WETERING: According to the big Webster the first expression means "highly complex" and "advanced" while the latter means "cultured" and "courteous." Both are positive characteristics. Obviously you don't know me well, for you only meet me during arranged meetings when I'm at my "Easter best," as we say in Holland. If you go by my writing, you're again limited in your observation because my books and my letters are thought out, carefully put together, contrived, premeditated even—like murder.

I think I'm certainly complex but so is everybody else, for the human mind seems to be capable of mirroring all the ten thousand things the universe offers and consists of. Advanced I'm not. Cultured is a very relative term. I may be more cultured than some, but I'm also less cultured than others. Courteous I usually am, but then I had the pleasure of living in England for a while—in the country, between cottages filled with retired gentlefolk—and the only way to survive was to imitate their noble behavior.

New England to me, perhaps because of where I'm located, is an improvement of that scene.

EQMN: In a *Publishers Weekly* interview last year Peter Gardner described you as having an "experienced" face.

DE WETERING: An experienced face? Now now now. Maybe it's the weather. We have all sorts of weather here in one hour. Maine sits right in the middle of all the crosswinds on earth and I have lived here for more than six years. All Mainers have experienced faces.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

In a memorable story called "The Mulligan Stew" (*EQMM*, January 1979), Donald E. Westlake satirized a particular sub-genre of political-espionage thriller: the novel, of which Fletcher Knebel's *Night of Camp David* (1965) is a celebrated early example, in which a government official begins to suspect that Something Sinister is going on in the White House and even "the President *himself*" may be involved. But some plots are so sure-fire that even the devastating ridicule of a Westlake cannot stop them from recurring.

**** Nicholas Guild: *The President's Man*, St. Martin's, $13.95. This time it is C.I.A. chief Frank Austen, son-in-law of President Simon Faircliff and the man whose political machinations helped get the charismatic Californian into office, who

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begins to smell a conspiratorial rat. Superior style, sensitive character development, and the chilling elaborateness of the plot itself make this novel one of the best of its school.

**** Michael Gilbert: *Mr. Calder and Mr. Behrens,* Harper and Row, $12.95. These dozen short stories comprise the second gathering in book form from this formidable series, which represents both the author and the short spy tale at their best. The Calder-Behrens stories are not mere vignettes but fully cast and densely plotted espionage novels-in-miniature.

**** Stephen Greenleaf: *State's Evidence,* Dial, $14.95. There are two major traps awaiting any writer attempting the mannered style of the Ross Macdonald-type private-eye novel: the danger of self-parody and the Robert B. Parker error of eschewing plot. Greenleaf avoids both in his third novel about San Francisco operative John Marshall Tanner. He is definitely one of the best contemporary hard-boiled writers, handling action, dialogue, and character with equal skill.

*** Bernard St. James: *The Seven Dreamers,* Doubleday-Crime Club, $10.95. This well written historical, based in Napoleonic France, offers one of those great opening situations: seven bodies are discovered sitting upright in chairs in a fashionable Paris house with their throats cut. Though the author has a message to drive home in lieu of a climactic surprise, the second novel about Inspector Blanc is quite an agreeable one.

*** John Buxton Hilton: *The Green Frontier,* St. Martin's, $9.95. Retired Superintendent Kenworthy recalls his days as a British interrogator in Berlin as he investigates the murder of a German "radio pastor" and its connection with the TV exposé of a World War II incident. The denouement of this graceful and inventive novel comes in the form of a transcript of the program.

*** Warren Murphy: *Smoked Out,* Pocket Books, $2.25. Insurance investigator Julian Burroughs (a.k.a. Digger) enters the scene in his first case drunk and talking like Groucho Marx. His investigation of the seemingly accidental death of a doctor's wife is both funny and nicely plotted. Most memorable is a credible method of deflecting the attack of a killer guard dog—but I don't want to try it. To my taste, this series promises to be much better than Murphy's highly touted Destroyer series, written alone or with Richard B. Sapir.

** Don Pendleton: *The Violent Streets,* Gold Eagle, $1.95. The Executioner interrupts his new campaign against international terrorism upon realizing he absent-mindedly forgot to wipe out the Mafia in St. Paul. As usual, Pendleton does what he does skillfully—the only question being the value of what he does. A serial rapist-killer is also involved here.

Most of the novels and stories about Michael Shayne that have appeared in print in the last twenty years under the familiar Brett Halliday byline have been the work of ghost writers rather than Davis Dresser, the original Halliday who died in 1977. Though some of the ersatz Shayne stories are pretty good, as a whole they have probably done Dresser's reputation as a mystery writer more harm than good. Thus

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it's nice to see someone reprinting the original Shayne series, beginning with the first one, 1939's *Dividend on Death* (Raven House, $2.25), a Miami-based private-eye puzzler with a twisting plot and a world of energy. Halliday-Dresser was one of a wonderful and often undervalued group of writers—typified by George Harmon Coxe and most notably represented on the current scene by Bill Pronzini, who combined a hard-boiled milieu with classical plotting.

Also in a new reprint edition is Charles Merrill Smith's 1974 mystery-writing debut, *Reverend Randollph and the Wages of Sin* (Avon, $2.50), the first and best of the satirical whodunits about an unconventional Chicago clergyman.

The latest *Ellery Queen's Anthology* (Volume 43, Spring/Summer 1982, Davis Publications, $2.95) offers a special treat: the first all-in-one-piece publication of Edward D. Hoch's "The Will-o'-the-Wisp Mystery," a 40,000-word episodic novel. Originally signed by "Mr. X," it first appeared in *EQMM* in 1971 as six self-contained short stories linked by cliffhanger endings. Recounting Manhunter David Piper's efforts to track down a half dozen prison escapees, as well as the shadowy outsider who engineered their escape, the narrative experiment offers one of the best examples of Hoch's technical brilliance. EQA #43 is also available in hardcover (*Ellery Queen's Maze of Mysteries*, Dial, $12.95).

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"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

PROPHET IN HIS OWN COUNTRY

by KATE ELDRED

"Fire and brimstone await," thundered the parson,
"Unless you repent—'Mene, Tekel, Upharsin!' "
His warning we spurned.
The church building burned.
Now we're trying the parson for arson.

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D2EX2

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a *NEW* Mr. Strang story by

WILLIAM BRITTAIN

The newest exploit of Mr. Leonard Strang, the gnomelike science teacher of Aldershot High School, is a genuine, blown-in-the-bottle, old-fashioned puzzler (often a welcome change of pace these sophisticated days). Listen to Mr. Strang's opening Sherlockian deductions (tossed off as if by the Master himself), and then—well, do your own unraveling. We'll give you only one hint: be wary of puns, diminutives, and synonyms . . .

MR. STRANG TAKES A PARTNER

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

"Would you be Mr. Strang, now?"

Mr. Strang looked up from the heap of chemical-stained glassware on the demonstration table at the front of his classroom. It was nearly 4:30, and he still had to wash the lab apparatus—"scrubbing the pots," he called it. This late in the day he didn't feel up to facing some overbearing parent bent on turning an offspring's C– into an A by dint of paternal persuasion.

A single glance at the figure in the doorway calmed his fears. The slender man who stood there might have been taken for a small boy but for a face seamed with creases which were accentuated by his broad smile. He was scarcely five feet tall, and his unruly shock of red hair was tinged here and there with wisps of gray. All in all, he put Mr. Strang in mind of a well-dressed leprechaun.

"I'm Mr. Strang." The science teacher wiped his damp hands on the lapels of his jacket.

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The little man extended a hand. "Corcoran's the name—Wesley Corcoran."

"Oh? Patty's father?"

"Yes. Matter of fact, Patricia's the reason I came calling."

"But she's doing quite well in biology and—"

"Tush, tush! It's not Patricia's schooling I wanted to see you about."

"Then what—"

"Mr. Strang, did you not tell my daughter's class as how any problem can be solved if all the evidence is available, and it's approached in the proper manner?"

Mr. Strang felt his face start to redden. "Well, I—"

"And furthermore, I understand you're quite the one for figuring out things. Not just science stuff neither, but all kinds of puzzles and things."

"Mr. Corcoran, it's really quite late, and I must be—"

"Ah, you force my hand. I was saving this to show you at a more opportune time, but before you can get somebody's help, you first have to get his attention, as the woman said while bashing at her husband with a rolling pin."

Corcoran reached into a jacket pocket and brought out what appeared to be a folded sheet of paper from a legal pad. "Would you just take a few seconds to read this?"

The teacher unfolded the paper. The penciled words on it were written in a quavery hand. It appeared to be a poem of some kind.

WHY work at my conundrums, faithful Wes?
To seek your fortune, no more and no less.
Now, having answered WHY, I leave to you
To find the WHAT, the WHEN, the WHERE, and WHO.
All answers lie beneath my roofing tiles
And in Alaska's literary isles.
The one you seek's a truly Nob'l man.
Now solve my little word games—if you can.

"What say you, Mr. Strang?" Corcoran asked when the teacher had finished reading. "Should I go now and leave you in peace?"

A grin spread across Mr. Strang's face as he saw the impish gleam in Corcoran's eyes. "You old fraud!" the teacher exclaimed. "Patty told you I could never turn down a good puzzle. Now what's this all about? Nothing criminal, is it?"

Corcoran shook his head. "More in the financial field. And now

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it's your turn. What have you gathered from the poem? About the man who wrote it, I mean?"

"Hmm." The teacher ran gnarled fingers through his sparse crop of hair. "I can't make much sense of the poem itself. But the writer—that's something else again. He's quite wealthy but in rather poor health. He's also fairly intelligent, and either his background or interests—or both—run to the newspaper business."

"Ah, ha!" Corcoran gave Mr. Strang's back a congratulatory pat. "You're just the man for me, sir. But how'd you know all them things just from the few lines here?"

"Well," Mr. Strang replied, "the hand that wrote these lines trembled. I surmised it was because of illness. As to his wealth, not only does he mention a fortune, but he also refers to his roofing tiles. Yes, the word does make the line rhyme properly, but it's also suggestive of enough money to afford something better than the usual asphalt shingles. The newspaper business? Every cub reporter in the world soon learns that *who, what, when, where,* and *why* are the elements of a good news story. The intelligence is obvious. He wrote the poem, didn't he? And it's got us both mystified."

Mr. Strang sat down at his desk. "And now that I've told you what I got from the poem, it's back to you again, Mr. Corcoran. What's this all about? Who wrote it? And why?"

"It was done by Rutherford Pyle," answered Corcoran.

Mr. Strang immediately recognized the name. "But I read he'd died just last week. Right here in Aldershot. His heart, wasn't it? A pity, too. Pyle could do things with the English language that were incredible. One of the most persuasive writers I ever read."

A smile spread across Corcoran's face. "You know a bit about Mr. Pyle, then?"

"More than a bit. He was an Horatio Alger hero come to life. A newspaper delivery boy at twelve. Fifteen years later he owned a midwest paper, and ten years after that he had four more. Ran them all himself, wrote a lot of the copy and editorials, said what he thought regardless of outside pressures, and the devil take the hindmost."

"Ah, that was a long time back," sighed Corcoran. "Those were the good days, Mr. Strang. And I was at his side through them all. My job was to kind of look after Mr. Pyle and do whatever little things he wanted of me. He said I was his good luck charm. But old age creeps up on us all. And when he had them two heart attacks—near five years ago, they were—he took the big house here

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in Aldershot to be near his daughter and her husband. Me and Patricia—my wife died long since, God rest her soul—lived there with him the whole time. The attacks weakened him something terrible. A short walk about the house once a day was the best he could manage. But I saw to it that the necessary chores got done, and in return, Mr. Corcoran gave me an education like no other in the world."

"Education?" asked Mr. Strang. "What do you mean?"

"Mr. Pyle has—had—a library that takes up near half the main floor. Oh, he was weak of body, but his mind was as quick as ever. Having naught to occupy himself, he decided to educate me beyond the six years of public school I'd had as a boy. I resisted at first, but later on his problems got to be kind of fun."

"Problems?"

"Yes, sir. He'd pretend like I was a reporter and he was sending me out to get a story. Only the place I'd go to get it was downstairs to the library. And heaven help me if I didn't have the who, what, when, where, and why by the time I returned."

"Just how did that work?" Mr. Strang asked.

"Well, I remember one time when he set me the task of finding two words that sounded the same but had opposite meanings. To find 'em, I had to read the dictionary, learning new words by the score."

"And what were the two words?"

"There were quite a few. Take two of 'em, now—*Raise* and *raze,* to build up and to tear down. Y'see, that was the cleverness of it. To find what Mr. Pyle asked, I had to do a tremendous amount of reading. I daresay there's few books even in that vast library of his what ain't got my thumb smudges in 'em. I'd have to find out everything there was to know about famous characters in literature—Uriah Heep, for instance—and bring in a story just like the character was a living person. Or there'd be a place I was to research, right down to knowing how much it would cost to fly there. And all the time I was learnin' and learnin', and me not even knowin' it. Because of Mr. Pyle's kindness, I'll vow there's many a college professor I could give a run for his money. It's because Mr. Pyle was so good to me that I know he wouldn't—he wouldn't—"

"He wouldn't what, Mr. Corcoran?"

"Mr. Pyle up and died, and now Patricia and me are out on our own, without enough money between us to buy a decent meal. That's not how he would have wanted it."

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"But surely there's a will," said the teacher.

"There is. It leaves everything to his daughter. He died too fast, Mr. Strang. Too fast."

"Too fast, Mr. Corcoran? I don't understand."

"Well, sir, over the past few months Mr. Pyle began talking with me about how things was going to be after he died. His estate and all. He was beginning to have intimations of his own mortality, don't you see. I was not mentioned in the will, as he didn't want his daughter and me arguing over who gets what. But several weeks ago he told me he'd put some money aside so me and Patricia would be taken care of after he'd passed away."

"I'm still puzzled. Why can't you just take that money and—"

"He didn't put the money in a bank or something like that. No, he concealed it somewhere in that house. And then he set me one more task. I was to be a reporter again and use the clues he gave me—leads, as he called 'em—to track down where the money was stashed away. If I couldn't find it inside a month, he promised to reveal the hiding place. Oh, it was foolish to do the thing that way, but he had so few things to occupy his mind. But before the month ended, he was—was—"

"Is that what this is all about?" asked Mr. Strang. "You mean hidden in that big house there's money which Rutherford Pyle meant you to have?"

"That's it, Mr. Strang," Corcoran replied. "Somewhere in the house—probably in the library itself—is the fortune mentioned in the poem. But before I could give the place a proper look, the lawyers for the estate told me I had to get out. The house is closed tight, and Patricia and I are living in a single room with barely enough ready cash to pay this week's rent."

"Umm." Mr. Strang toyed with his acid-stained necktie. "You know, Mr. Corcoran, legally you haven't a leg to stand on. If Pyle left everything to his daughter, you can't claim a dime based on some vague promise he made before he died."

"True. But the daughter—Laura Aikens is her married name—has left me a bit of hope. She knew the high regard her father had for me. She said if Mr. Pyle meant me to have something, I was to have it."

"Then why not just go back and search until the money shows up?"

"No, that won't do. I showed Mrs. Aikens the poem and the rest, but she wasn't convinced they were anything but the maunderings

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of an old man. The only way I could claim what was due me, she said, was to prove to her that the clues made some sense and then go into the house and head straight for the hiding place. She'd not allow any hunting expeditions, with me claimin' any cash I came upon."

"I see," said Mr. Strang. "That's the problem, then. You have to prove to Laura Aikens' satisfaction that a hiding place exists and then locate it without any margin for error."

"That's it indeed," replied Corcoran. "And it must be done within the next four days, as after that, Mr. and Mrs. Aikens are moving away, leaving only a caretaker and the house locked up tight. I despaired of having any chance at all until Patricia suggested you might be able to help."

Mr. Strang rubbed his hands together briskly. "Challenge accepted, Mr. Corcoran," he said. "The poem goes here." He spread the wrinkled yellow paper on his desk and then gestured to Corcoran.

"Let's have the rest of it," he said. "You've talked about clues—plural—as well as the poem 'and the rest.' What 'rest,' Mr. Corcoran? What other leads did Mr. Pyle give you?"

Again Corcoran reached into a pocket. He pulled out four small white cards. "I'm afraid you'll find these as confusing as the poem," he told the teacher.

There were words on each card in the same spidery handwriting as the poem. Mr. Strang peered through black-rimmed glasses at the top one.

Bobby writes to a rodent.
WHO have plans turned to dust at 39 and 40?

The next message was equally obscure:

Fight him for a nation!
WHAT are the fruits of Julie's labors?

The third didn't help much either:

Bill's Dicky Three emotes, beginning one and one.
WHEN is the season of low spirits?

And finally:

Public Enemy Number One begins to Nod.
WHERE is the marked man's newfound land?

Mr. Strang stared long and hard at the four cards. "Nothing," he said finally. "Let me see that poem again."

He tapped the yellow paper with a gnarled finger. "The WHY is given here," he said. " 'To seek your fortune, no more and no less.'

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WHAT and WHEN and WHERE and WHO have something to do with the clues on the white cards. But we must begin with the poem. I'm sure of it."

"Can you find nothing at all?" asked Corcoran anxiously.

"The first part of the poem's clear enough. You're to seek your fortune somewhere in the house—'beneath my roofing tiles.' It's the next two lines that stump me. What are 'Alaska's literary isles'? And why make a contraction of the word 'noble,' to say nothing of capitalizing it?"

"As to the isles," murmured Corcoran, "the only ones I was able to think of up around Alaska are the Aleutians."

"Aleutians," replied Mr. Strang. "Yes, they're well enough known, and I don't think Pyle would give you something too obscure. But whoever heard of literary Aleutians?"

"I have!" called a chipper voice from the hallway outside the room.

"What!" cried Mr. Strang and Corcoran together.

A smiling woman's face appeared around the corner of the doorway. It was surmounted by gray hair tied with a large knot in the back. Several pencils were stuck into the knot like pins in a cushion.

"Maude Wiggins, get in here this instant!" bellowed Mr. Strang.

The woman entered the room, cocking her head like a somewhat aged sparrow. "Wesley Corcoran, Maude Wiggins," said Mr. Strang. "Maude's our head librarian."

"I'd just finished unpacking some reproductions of so-called art masterpieces," she said. "Masterpieces, my foot! Honestly, Leonard, how anybody can put a few daubs of paint on a canvas and sell it for thousands of dollars is beyond me. Anyway, I was just passing your room when I heard you say—"

"Literary Aleutians," Mr. Strang repeated. "What are they, Maude?"

"Literary allusions," she said, stressing the pronunciation, "are oblique references to—well, literature. For example, Leonard, if you were to tell me that 'age cannot wither me, nor custom stale my infinite variety,' I'd know you'd been reading Shakespeare's *Anthony and Cleopatra,* even as I fell swooning into your arms."

"Aleutians—allusions," mused Mr. Strang. "Nearly identical sounds. Hydrozoa, Maude, I think you've found it! That's just the kind of linguistic trick that Pyle loved to pull. And the last line of the poem even mentions 'word games.' We didn't catch on because we were reading, not listening. Maude, I love you. You're beautiful.

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Will you run away with me and live in sin in a thatched hut somewhere?" And he planted a big kiss on her cheek.

"Leonard Strang, you're an old fool!" she sputtered. "At your age, sinning means grabbing fifteen minutes of extra sleep in the morning."

"I'm only two years older than you, Maude."

She made a mock slap at his face. "And you're no gentleman, either."

By the desk, Corcoran shook his head in confusion. "I don't get it," he said. "What's happening here?"

"I was about to ask the same thing," said Maude.

" 'All answers lie beneath my roofing tiles'—that is, in the house," explained Mr. Strang, his hands trembling with excitement. " 'And in Alaska's literary isles'—in literary allusions. The WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHO questions have their answers in the Pyle library. And when we find the answers, they'll lead us to the money, to the fortune."

"I don't know what this is all about," said Maude. "But if you need a library, mine's available. And this sounds a lot more exciting than going home and cleaning the oven. So I demand to join you, with full partnership privileges. After all, if it weren't for me, you two would still be freezing in Alaska."

"We're delighted to have you," said Mr. Strang gallantly. "Tell me, partner, do you think our beloved principal, Mr. Guthrey, would be annoyed if we spent a few hours in the library?"

"I think he'd have a fit," replied Maude. "Everybody's supposed to be out of the building by five o'clock. Oh, well, it's his blood pressure, not mine. Come on, I still have my key. Just my luck. The first time in twenty-five years a man—two men—want to spend an evening alone with me, and all we're going to do is look at books."

Once seated at one of the library's huge tables, Mr. Strang filled Maude in on Corcoran's problem. Then the three took turns staring at the four cards.

"Which one do you have now?" Mr. Strang asked Corcoran after thirty minutes of fruitless endeavor.

"The one about Public Enemy Number One," was the reply. "All that's in my mind is Edward G. Robinson in the movie."

"I'm working on 'Bill's Dicky,' " said Maude. "Isn't that just too cute for words? To my way of thinking, the person who invented diminutives of names should be drawn and quartered. 'Bill's Dicky'

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indeed. How would you like to be called Lenny Strang, Leonard? Why can't this be William's Rich—"

And then there was a silence as Maude and Mr. Strang stared at each other. This was followed by a wild scrambling as they both raced to the far end of the room.

Maude, being more familiar with the arrangement of the library, was the first to reach the proper place. She removed a book from the shelf, riffled through its pages for a few moments, then pointed to a line of type.

"Got it," murmured Mr. Strang. "Now we know the WHEN." And he jotted the line in a small notebook.

"Now that we've got the hang of it, Leonard, it shouldn't take long to figure out those other cards," said Maude. "Let me try my hand at WHO."

Who came easily. WHAT and WHERE required a bit more thought, and there were several unproductive searches through the library's stacks. But in another hour both Mr. Strang and Maude Wiggins were sure they knew the identity of Rutherford Pyle's "Nob'l man." And they were reasonably certain of the location of Wesley Corcoran's fortune in the huge Pyle mansion.

Still, they put their theory to Corcoran himself with some misgivings. "We'll only get the one chance," Mr. Strang told him. "And if we're wrong, it's goodbye fortune."

"In for a penny, in for a pound," was Corcoran's blithe reply. "Your ideas sound fine to me. And if they don't work out, at least we had our try. I'll not hold hard luck against either of you. Now I guess it's time to make an appointment with Mrs. Aikens."

She was perhaps fifty years old. Her bearing was queenly as she approached the massive chair in the center of the room, and she carried a long cigarette holder in her right hand like a royal scepter. Before sitting down she turned in a full circle, looking intently at the shelves of books which covered all four walls from floor to ceiling. The room in the Pyle mansion was huge, larger even than the Aldershot High School library.

It had to be huge, thought Mr. Strang, to contain a presence as commanding as that of Mrs. Laura Aikens.

"Mr. Corcoran, Mr. Strang, Miss Wiggins," she said, settling into the chair's depths with great aplomb, "welcome to my father's house. You tell me, Mr. Corcoran, that father wished you to have some token of gratitude for your years of service to him. It is my further

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understanding that Mr. Strang and Miss Wiggins are assisting you—your paladins, so to speak."

"Yes, Mrs. Aikens." Corcoran's voice was little more than a husky whisper.

"Very well," she went on. "I will not stand in the way of any wishes my late father had concerning the disposition of his estate, and I reject any petty legal arguments concerning the propriety of those wishes. Very simply, Mr. Corcoran, if father wished you to have something, you will have it.

"But I won't have any clever opportunist sullying my father's memory by trying to gain by trickery that which is not his. So the ground rules, if you will, are simple. You must convince me that the clues of which you spoke came from my father. You must further convince me that those clues lead to a specific spot in this house. And finally, you must go to that spot and find something of real or sentimental value to you. If these three conditions are met, I will give you that which you claim as soon as the will is probated. Is that understood?"

"Y-yes," sputtered Corcoran.

"Then you may begin."

Mr. Strang and Maude Wiggins whispered together for a few seconds. Then the librarian shook her head firmly and backed toward the far wall. Mr. Strang walked to the great chair, reached into his pocket, and removed the poem and the four white cards.

"It seems I've been elected to do the talking," he said. "First, I—we—ask you to look at these cards, Mrs. Aikens. Are they in your father's handwriting?"

She examined the cards intently. Finally she nodded. "Yes, my father wrote these."

"First condition met, then," the teacher stated. "For these are the clues he gave to Wesley Corcoran."

For the first time a bit of a smile played about Mrs. Aikens' lips. "Go on."

"Note the poem. Its fifth line states that the fortune is in this house and also in 'Alaska's literary isles.' Mr. Corcoran and I took that to mean the Aleutians and, by extension, literary Aleutians. But we give Miss Wiggins full marks for discovering that your father was referring to literary *allusions.*"

Mrs. Aikens' smile grew larger. "I will grant—reluctantly, Mr. Strang—that the pun in the phrase 'literary Aleutians' is one which

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my father was not only capable of but which he would have delighted in."

"Therefore," the teacher continued, "the WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHO cards must be literary references."

"Must they? You'll have to convince me, Mr. Strang."

"I hope to. Now each card first makes a cryptic statement and then asks a question. This seems to indicate that the statement is a clue to answer the question. Wouldn't you agree?"

Mrs. Aikens remained impassive. "Go on."

"Our first break came on the 'Bill's Dicky' card when Maude—Miss Wiggins—objected to the diminutive names and substituted the full ones. When that was done, the line read: 'William's Richard Three emotes, beginning one and one'."

"Oh!" Suddenly Laura Aikens clapped her hands together in delight. The childish gesture was so out of character that Mr. Strang stared in astonishment.

"William Shakespeare's *Richard III!*" she cried. "Of course."

The teacher breathed a sigh of relief. It seemed the second condition—that the woman be convinced that the cards indeed held clues—could be met more easily than he'd feared.

"And Scene *One* of Act *One*," he said, accenting the numbers, "begins with Richard saying, 'Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious summer of this sun of York.' So, Mrs. Aikens—'WHEN is the season of low spirits?' "

"The winter of our discontent."

"Good." Mr. Strang felt himself to be on firm ground now. Laura Aikens seemed as pleased to give a correct answer as any giggling schoolgirl.

"Now let's try the WHO card," he went on.

"Bobby—Robert," mused Laura Aikens. "Let me see. That might be Robert Browning or Robert Burns or Robert Louis—"

"I was at a loss on that one," Mr. Strang interrupted, "until Maude bailed me out. It seems one of Robert Burns's best-known poems is titled *To a Mouse*. And line 39 of the poem, continuing on to 40, is—" Mr. Strang consulted his notebook. "—'The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft a-gley.' So if 'a-gley' means wrong, WHO, then, 'have plans turned to dust?' "

"Mice and men, isn't it?" replied Laura Aikens.

"Right," said the teacher. "Third, let's consider Public Enemy Number One. This took us a bit longer. But it occurred to me that 'begins to' on the card might mean 'starts toward.' I also got to

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wondering whether 'Number One' might mean not the most dangerous, but the first in time. Public enemies of importance are usually killers, Mrs. Aiken. And the Number One murderer, who was marked by the Lord for his crime, was—"

Laura Aikens arched her eyebrows. "You mean Cain?" she asked. "From the Bible?"

"I do," Mr. Strang assured her. "And note the capitalization of Nod. The Bible tells us, in Genesis 4:16, that: 'Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod—"

"That's why it's capitalized!" Laura exclaimed.

"—'on the east of Eden!" Mr. Strang concluded.

"Then the answer to WHERE is 'east of Eden'." By now, Laura was enjoying herself hugely. "But there's still WHAT. 'Fight him for a nation!' That doesn't make sense. And who's Julie? Julius? Julian?"

"Maude, you figured this one out all by yourself," said Mr. Strang, turning to the librarian. "Do the honors, please."

"Well," Maude began with unaccustomed timidity, "I couldn't think of a pun for 'fight,' so I just started substituting words that meant about the same. 'War,' 'brawl,' 'quarrel,' and so forth. And then I hit on 'battle'."

"Battle him for a nation," said Laura slowly. "I don't—yes, I do! Him and hymn—they sound the same, but they're different words, 'Fight him for a nation!' is *The Battle Hymn of the Republic.*"

"Written by Julie Ward Howe," Mr. Strang chimed in. "And if you remember the first few lines, you'll get the 'fruits' of Julia's—or 'Julie's'— 'labors.' "

Laura began humming softly. "Ta ta ta ta tata—where the grapes of wrath are stored." She paused. "The fruits—they're the grapes of wrath, aren't they?"

Mr. Strang nodded. "So now we have all four questions answered. WHO is 'mice and men.' WHAT is 'the grapes of wrath.' WHEN is 'the winter of our discontent.' And finally, WHERE is 'east of Eden'."

Suddenly Laura Aikens seemed to change again before their eyes. Gone was the incredulous schoolgirl, happy in answering her teachers correctly. And again there sat in the huge chair the imperious queen of the Rutherford Pyle estate. "This has all been very interesting," she proclaimed. "But I scarcely see how the books you've mentioned lead to any kind of hiding place."

At that, Maude Wiggins marched up to the chair, her eyes flashing. "We don't want to see any of the books we mentioned," she

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snapped. "What we do want to look at is the shelf where your father kept the works of John Steinbeck."

"John Steinbeck? But—"

"Yes, Mrs. Aikens," said Mr. Strang gently. "John Steinbeck. The author of *Of Mice and Men,* of *The Grapes of Wrath,* of *The Winter of Our Discontent,* and of *East of Eden.* Four titles by the same author—four literary allusions. And not very obscure titles, what with three of the books having been made into movies, to say nothing of numerous TV adaptations."

"But I always considered Steinbeck a rather earthy, rugged author. Why would father have referred to him in the poem as noble?"

"Not noble, Mrs. Aikens. Nob'l. Or, if we consider the capital N and put the missing vowel in its proper place—Nobel. Were you aware, Mrs. Aikens, that in 1962, John Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for literature?"

Slowly Laura Aikens lowered her head. And then something shook her body. Once. Then again.

She was laughing.

"Father's word-play," she giggled. "Even after death it goes on. There, Mr. Corcoran, on one of those shelves by the fireplace. There's where you'll find the Steinbeck books."

Corcoran approached the shelf. "There seem to be four Steinbeck books here," he said. "And the very titles you mentioned."

He drew one of the books from the shelf and peered closely at its cover. Then he sniffed it. "No first edition, this," he said. "It's too new. Worth perhaps fifteen dollars at most. I'm afraid we lose, Mr. Strang. Miss Wiggins, I'm sorry to have troubled you."

He held the book loosely by its spine, and Mr. Strang could see tears welling in his eyes. "He forgot me," Corcoran murmured sadly. "He forgot—"

Something appeared from between the pages of the book and fluttered to the floor. It was followed by a second fluttering. They appeared to be slips of paper.

Quickly Maude scooped up one from the floor, looked at both front and back, and uttered a loud gasp. "It's a thousand-dollar bill!"

But already Mr. Strang had snatched the book from Corcoran's hand and was shaking it vigorously. Bills dropped from between the pages like green snow. The second book revealed a similar cache. And the third. And the fourth.

A hundred such bills were found among the pages of the four Steinbeck volumes.

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"One hundred thousand dollars!" Corcoran gasped, scarcely able to believe his own words. "Oh, thank you, Mr. Strang. And you, Miss Wiggins. And you, Mrs. Aikens."

"I won't be able to turn the money over to you until the will's probated," said Laura Aikens. "It's part of the estate now, and the lawyers will want to know about this. But as soon as everything is settled, I'll send you a check, Mr. Corcoran. And in the meantime, if you need a little something to tide you over, I'll be happy to—"

"Perhaps that won't be necessary," said Mr. Strang. "Once this story hits the newspapers, I'm sure Mr. Corcoran's credit will be excellent."

"One hundred thousand!" sighed Maude. "Leonard, on the strength of our success, I think you ought to take me out to dinner this evening. Ah, Le Chateau Brun. Or perhaps The Aldershot Inne."

"Dinner sounds fine," the teacher replied. "But Wesley Corcoran got the money, not I. And it's a week until payday. Will it be your place or mine?"

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

A TIDY SOLUTION

by MURIEL DESMOND

A neat señorita from Spain,
In a manner distinctly arcane,
Would process a lover,
Then take off the cover,
And pour him, with sighs, down the drain.

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After the group was discovered, the rest was history. But in the rock-music business, centuries are short, years last a split second, and history can be brief . . .

SOMETHING FROM THE PAST

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Back when it hit me that the crock of gold was rancid, it meant jumping off the up staircase. *Crosstown Traffic* did it—that was the name in the charts, but Sim and Fish and me always tagged it *That Ripoff Thing*, partly to stop others saying it. Two-thirds of it, the heart and the guts, was pretty much the same riff you hear in half a dozen great rock songs, a riff you can hardly help playing when three chords is all you're comfortable with.

Sim drummed around with that and added a wicked little hook and I clawed stuff on the guitar out of the recent past while Fish cursed a long tailback making us late for the gig. The whole thing was finished inside a day and the result made better than $800,000, they say.

The Business was even crazier then, and you can bank on that in Denver. We composed (if that's the word) the number and nothing happened for two years—a lifetime when you're 17 going on 21.

A guy called Harry Anglo had been managing us. He was fairly honest and the worst to be said about him was that he was a great businessman, only his business was fast-food franchising. We left him, or the other way around, within months. He'd laid out a little bread, but rock-group managers get to meet a lot of foxy ladies so there were no bad feelings either side. Except that Harry Anglo said, "Catch me messing with music again and you can kick my butt, agreed?"

But a year later Harry fell across this all-girl band trading as The Intactas and became a manager again. This time he sent their demo tapes far and wide. Being Harry, he put one of ours in with them by error. Marc Gerard, and you must have heard of *him*, caught *That Ripoff Thing* and foamed at the mouth.

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Harry Anglo had to pay a private eye to trace us. The rest is history—only in The Business centuries are short, years last a split second, and history can be brief.

But for a while there, we were sure money would run out of our ears. The Business being what it is we never laid hands on much, but the excitement and uncaringness about spending soaked us like oil from a gusher.

It wasn't all good, from the start, though. Marc Gerard insisted on putting in his own keyboards ace, an older guy called Brummie who had expertise and nothing more. Harry Anglo's management contract turned out to be still valid and he squeezed Marc into hiring Cindy Morah. Visual appeal, Harry argued, and Marc bought it before bumping poor Harry off the pot in a cloud of lawyers.

Cindy was an ex-Intacta who didn't sing flat that often, and never looked it. Everything about her was kind of reined-in and quivering. Magnolia petals beaded with sweat, not dew. Whatever she said, the basic message was, Let's get it on, life's short, I'm bored and hungry, guy. I don't want to talk about Cindy.

Sim loved her. Sim thought too much and was short at least one layer of skin on his emotions, a romantic who was a sucker for lost causes. She added him to her stable and then went after Fish and me.

Still, we racked up four hot singles and two albums before I did the dumb thing and decided to git, put on my walking boots at four in the morning and did just that. The only thing I took was a boss axe—a beautiful old original Fender a guy gave me when we played the Garden. (A middle-aged Hispanic character swerved past and through the security line and handed it up to me like a bouquet of flowers—the best thing he had, a tribute if you like, but also bitter sacrifice because I'd smoked two jays before we went on and I *knew* he was saying I could use that guitar better than he. It made me feel small. I stopped playing and grabbed it by the neck and yelled at him to come back, but he'd gone.)

Anyway, I wrapped the axe in that big plastic bag the Hyatt Regency leaves in the bathroom, hating to carry a guitar in a black coffin with a handle, and started walking. I had ten dollars in my back pocket. The money thing had been fun in a creepy way but I wanted no part of it any more.

The strangest thing happened as I trudged away. I got a rank blast of Cindy Morah's scent, leaned the Fender against a traffic

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sign, ripped off my shirt, and just made it to the cover of some bushes beside the hotel parking lot before being sick as a dog.

I had a fancy to be in Memphis again. Sit on those grey riverbank stones that came all the way from England as ballast in the old sailing ships, toss empty beer cans into the Mississip', and then head for a jazz bar. Fifty miles from there, full darkness, I was flat broke and footsore and ready to believe there was an outside-edge chance of being happy again. I climbed a split-rail fence and slept in a barn where the smell was dry rot and my childhood.

The barn gave me dreams about Pa from way back, hard times but fine times. Cindy slid in there somehow, making sly and dirty faces behind his back so the dream became a nightmare. Then a mouse ran over my foot and it was the next day, with the sound of fowls squabbling while their rooster challenged the sunrise. I was stiff as a corpse and the plastic around the Fender had turned grey plush from dawn mist.

She stood in the doorway, staring, ready but not scared. Not allowing herself to show it anyway. Chunky, neither young nor old, with blonde hair and apple cheeks and a broken nose. Her face put me in mind of a little lioness—it was there in the watchful tawny gaze and the broad forehead and the flattened nose. Last of all, I saw she was carrying a shotgun, broken open for safety, with a fat red No. 12 cartridge stuck between the second and third fingers of her free hand like a cigar, ready to drop it in the breech and close the piece with a snap of her arm.

"It's okay, I'm a musician!" I said. Meaning I wasn't a burglar or a rapist planning an early start.

"We've all got something to live down," she replied, deadpan. "Wash up, and there'll be coffee. Before you go." She walked away.

My eyes stung with tears and my heart hammered. Nobody knows why we love a certain person. For me, it was like finding something and only then realizing I'd been looking for it since I was so high. I wanted to run after her hollering that it was all right, both our troubles were over.

The gunk in the razor I borrowed had hardened into cement and the seam of the spray-shave can was rusty. I wondered if her gone-away man had died or if he was just a natural fool.

"You're behind with the plowing," I said, coffee scalding my lip. She was at the sink, keeping her back to me. "I could fix that—I grew up on a place like this. Almost exactly like." The state of the

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house shouted that she was alone, with more tasks than hours in a day to hold them.

"The tractor's bust and I've got no money," she said to the window.

"I've got money." But then I remembered that I hadn't. The idea of going back and trying for some of my rightful dues was no good. Fish wouldn't mind, but Marc Gerard would talk contractual obligation and Sim— The bruises he'd put on my throat were only starting to fade.

She whipped round, blazing. "Quit it! I don't need it! I'm divorced—I get by fine on my own. Leave me alone."

We argued it back and forth until Janet, which was her name, said she couldn't afford a hired hand and I came back with me not being a hired hand. She stormed off, and I called it a draw, looked at the tractor, hitched a ride into Memphis and sold the Fender. Clean sold it, without a twinge or a whimper.

I was putting fresh plugs in the tractor when she came out and stood behind me. "Please don't do this, Anse. Or whatever your real name is."

An hour later she came back. "I'll get my brother to throw you off the place."

"You'd do better to get him to stake you to a new tractor." Five got you ten he didn't exist, or if he did he didn't care enough. I was mad, skin off both sets of knuckles and my right index finger pinched numb but starting to throb.

The motor caught, faltered, and began a willing but too old heartbeat. She clapped her hands, then it stalled with a reproachful wheeze and shudder, and we laughed. "Come in," she said. "There's food on the table. But you can't stay, you mustn't."

She kept telling me that for the next two weeks.

Before we made love the first time, she pressed my face between her hands. "Don't ever promise me anything, Anse. I know you'll go away. Nothing stays good."

My throat hurt. "My whole life's a promise to you now, Janet. I can't help it. Let's get married, soon as we can." That was almost the end right there. So I cursed and pleaded and swore that it was just a casual thing, sheer animal wanting with a small passing shred of affection, and she accepted the lie.

Once she said, "For a young man, you've got a powerful hate of the past. It doesn't make sense. You've been used to better than this. All you've got now is hard work, three squares, and a steady woman."

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"Don't talk like that."

"The truth that wounds, Anse."

"It's not the truth. I've never known better." Getting a flash of Cindy Morah, and Sim's face when she told him, I tasted gall.

"Maybe you killed somebody and went on the run," she brooded. "You were broke when you came here, but that leather jacket cost three hundred dollars if it cost a cent. Pretty soon you'll get tired of the simple life."

"You're wrong."

"Nothing stays good," she murmured.

"It can, Janet. Marry me. Then you'll know I'm here for keeps."

"I've been married, Anse. It doesn't guarantee a thing except heartbreak." She turned on her side and pretended to fall asleep.

Another night I woke to find her crying soundlessly, sitting up and clasping her knees, tear-tracks silver on her cheeks in the moonlight. "No, no, it's all right," she said. "Anse, you'll go someday. Don't feel bad about it. It's the way things are, and what we've had puts me a hundred percent ahead of the game."

As the song says, seasons turned, turned, turned. We sold our crops, we did all right. And eventually Janet let me into herself, though I sensed her shaking her head at the foolishness of it. When we were certain about the baby, she gave in. We got married a week after that. And after another week, Sim found me.

I was fixing the tractor, not the original one but its younger brother that I'd bought fourth-hand and was maybe half as reliable. Janet had been hanging the wash out in the yard, singing to herself. She couldn't carry a tune but it pleased me because she only sang when she felt extra happy or secure—the same thing, to my Lion Lady.

The wet sheets made sailing-ship noises and a shadow slanted across the engine block and didn't go away. I turned, expecting her to be there with coffee in the brown mug and a cookie.

Time machine: Sim hadn't changed at all. For an instant, that put me back to where we'd all been. The wolfskin coat came down to his heels. He was wearing a pearl-grey hat that wasn't quite a Stetson with a little vivid-blue feather in the band. No change at all. Sim had always been the looker, the sharp dresser.

I'd avoided reading the trades or watching certain TV shows, but I'd taken it for granted he'd keep working and do well in The Busi-

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ness. But maybe he wasn't doing so well—the coat had been around when I took off, and that was the thick end of two years now.

"Where is she?" he asked. Quiet, pleasant, no greetings or threats or mention of the time between, just taking up our talk exactly where it had stopped.

The coat hung from his shoulders, cape style, hiding his arms. I wished I could see his right hand. Sim had been into handguns and I didn't like that even when we were tight. All the wrenches were on the far side of the tractor and a pair of pliers was no weapon.

"Where is she?" Sim repeated. He'd swung at me just after asking that when I'd last seen him. Suddenly I thought about Janet, a gush of ice water in the gut, a sensation like an electric shock. But then I saw her, a moving shape in the kitchen window. Sim wouldn't have gotten this far without her wanting to know his business. He hadn't harmed her. I could go back to worrying about me.

The crazy part was, seeing him brought back a lot of good stuff along with the fear and guilt and garbage. The question fell off my tongue, the first thing I thought of. "How's Fish? I keep thinking about him."

"He's dead. Happened a year ago, a hit-and-run accident." He sounded impatient over me not knowing. "He found that new musical direction he kept nagging about. Straight to hell, Anse, where all you liars are heading."

His weight shifted, the edge of the coat moved, and there it was—.357 Magnum, dull black metal, plastic grips trying to pass as walnut. It'd kick like a bitch, but that was no help because Sim had wrists like steel and wire-rope muscles. Never arm-wrestle a drummer. Also, he was maybe ten feet off, far too near and a lot too far.

Even before seeing the gun, I knew. Poor Fish, he blew great harp and hadn't a vicious bone in him. Not bright, though, and his patience wasn't endless. It wasn't a hit-run accident. Sim had kept asking Fish about Cindy Morah until Fish hollered loud enough to make Sim have to hear. Having heard, he had killed Fish—it was written all over him.

The fear was bad enough, but worse was thinking about Janet being right—I'd not be there for her any more. I could hear Pa telling me, "Take what you want, says the Good Lord—and pay for it." I felt like throwing my head back and howling in grief and rage at myself. Janet didn't deserve this, and I'd brought it on her.

What I'd taken was Cindy. Just the once. I was high and it was

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her idea. Later she said it hadn't been much, I wasn't a lover in Sim's league, she'd just wanted the thrill of making it with the guy he was tightest with, that was all.

Just a sweet unspoiled child was Cindy. She thought of a thrill to top cheating on Sim—namely, tell him about it. Being too mad to stop for one of his big pistols, he'd tried to kill me with his hands. But nobody's punched me out since I was fourteen years old, Pa saw to that.

So he'd beat up on Cindy a little and she tried her fourth, fifth, or whatever O.D. to scare him, but Sim slept through it, so Cindy made it all the way to eternity.

He couldn't accept it, even while they were wheeling her out in a body bag. He kept asking where she was, accusing Fish and me of holding out on him.

Now you know why I took off with a deep hunger to live right and just work for what I could get, like Pa.

"How'd you find me?" I tried to start a casual stroll around the front of the tractor, but his arm came up, stiff and straight, his left hand cupping his right. I did a great job of stopping right where my foot landed.

"Same way Harry Anglo did when he wanted us. I hired a detective. You rapped a lot about Memphis and being a farm boy at heart, Anse. Then there was the Fender, the only thing you took. I told him to start from Memphis and spread out, checking farms, checking anyplace you might've sold that guitar."

"It took a long time."

I wasn't sure why he had to be kept talking.

He lowered the Magnum, though not all the way. "I was in—a hospital. Like a hospital. Then I wasted time, having the eye look for Cindy. He struck out, bought some crazy tale she was dead. So I turned him loose on you."

He gazed at me. "Where is she? I know she's not here—your new woman never heard of her. But you know where she went. Tell me, and that's it, no sweat, I walk away and find her." His lids still flickered when he was lying under stress.

"It's a long story." I stared at the bridge of his nose to stop myself warning him. Janet was barefoot and the grass back of the house was lush. The clothes parted on the line in a gust of wind and she walked through like a star coming onstage.

"I want to hear the story."

What he heard was the Lion Lady stepping on a twig. He turned

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in time to catch the shotgun across his forehead, a baseball swing. The stock snapped off and flew past my ear and she went sprawling as Sim toppled the other way.

She was on her hands and knees, retching, when I reached her. "I've killed him!"

"Not hardly." The hat had taken some of the impact. Sim was breathing. He was probably concussed, but not as badly hurt as Fish, nor as badly as he'd planned me to be.

As Janet struggled up, she saw the Magnum lying in the dirt. "He—he meant to shoot you?" Which threw me, because she was genuinely surprised.

"He fooled me," she explained. "Nice as pie, and saying you'd thrown up a great future, that you could be rich and famous and he intended to make it happen. I lost my head, Anse. I could see you being a different person, and I'd never survive in that world. I was mad at you for making me depend on you."

We were sitting in the waiting room at Doc Hatch's. Hell of a name, in his line of work. Janet was fine—it was me feeling weak and dizzy after him telling us that violent exertion at her stage was no big thing, she hadn't lost the baby.

Sim was in custody. He'd broken out of a security facility for the criminally disturbed in California six months before. He was there for killing Fish, as I'd sensed.

She took my hand.

"Who's Eric Clapton, Anse?"

"Huh? God, if you're a guitar freak—"

Janet got that line back between her eyebrows and my hand was just something she'd forgotten was in her own.

"He said you could have blown Clapton away in a year or two the way you were going."

"Now you know Sim's crazy. I was a lousy musician, hon. I didn't have it. That's why I took off."

Not believing it, she said, "He talked about a girl too."

"There was one. She was rotten and I was no better. Then. It's over—it would have been even if she wasn't dead, which she is."

My knees were working again. I walked us out to the pick-up. "You saved my life, girl. I owed you before. But that isn't keeping me with you. Where you are is my home, and a home's what I want. Clear? Make sense?"

The Lion Lady said, "I think I wanted to kill *you*, I was so des-

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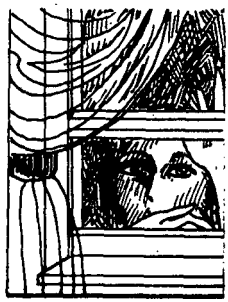
perate. I only clobbered him because he was the closest. I just wanted to lash out."

"You didn't put shells in the gun, Janet."

"There weren't any." She laughed shakily. "I'm a terrible person, Anse."

Driving along, I found myself whistling *Crosstown Traffic* and not feeling bad inside. It wasn't a good song or a bad one, just a song, something from the past that would be staying back there.



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a *NEW* short story by

H. R. F. KEATING

first publication in the United States

Once every three months, old Cousin Edna came down to London from Kettering, where she presided over the typing pool at a big government research place, and stayed with David and his parents for two nights. David hated her . . .

DEAD-LETTER DROP

by H. R. F. KEATING

It's an affront to a boy of ten to learn about how spies work from a fifty-year-old spinster. But it was from his Cousin Edna that David learnt what a dead-letter drop is. That it is the well chosen hideyhole, like a loose brick high up in an unfrequented alleyway or a hollow place in the fourth tree along from the railway bridge, that a spy uses to pass on stolen secrets to his spymaster.

It wasn't even as though David liked Cousin Edna. In fact, he hated her. Creaky and thin, with her face looking as if it was moulded onto the bone beneath with candle grease, she wafted down onto him whenever she bent to kiss him, as she would insist on doing, a sickening odor of sweet face powder and strong toothpaste. Once every three months she came down from Kettering, where she presided over the typing pool at a big government research place, and stayed for two nights. David knew her "little London jaunts," as she called them, consisting as they did of a series of narking criticisms preceded by such phrases as "I know it's not my place to say it but," were just as unpopular with his parents as they were with him.

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The way he found out about dead-letter drops from such an unlikely informant was simple: one morning he followed her. She always went out for what she called "a little breath of good London air before breakfast" and, as David was practising following people and had given himself his own breakfast a good half hour earlier, he slipped off after her and dodged along behind parked cars, keeping her in sight. So he was able to see quite clearly how she paused by the fourth tree along from the railway bridge and, when she thought no one was about, reached up quickly and pushed something into a hollow place where the first branches forked.

To begin with, of course, David just wondered why Cousin Edna had done such a funny thing. And as soon as she had hurried off he went over to the tree, scrambled up its knobbly trunk, and thrust a hand into the deep cleft half filled with soft, warm, tindery wood. He found a long thin packet, a sort of envelope made of dark oily-looking paper.

He opened it, reasoning sensibly that it had been left where anyone could have found it. It was when he saw inside a narrow strip of camera-film that he realized Cousin Edna must be a spy. He knew it even before he held the strip up to the light and saw that the pictures on it were of plans. Cousin Edna had referred too often to the "great big important secrets" that abounded at her place of work for him to have any doubts.

His first thought was that now he could get Cousin Edna arrested and that would be the end of her little London jaunts. But almost at the same instant it came to him that she was, after all, one of the family "in a way" and that to tell the police about her would be—he couldn't produce the word but the thought was there—a betrayal.

Then, as he pushed the film back into the long thin envelope, he thought that Cousin Edna deserved to be betrayed for being so nasty—and then that somehow because she was so nasty she deserved not to be betrayed.

And so he stood on the empty early-morning pavement with a pigeon in the leaves above him going coo-coo-coo and everything around fresh and still, and he felt hot from head to foot with torment over what he ought to do. Then, just as the pigeon flew out of the tree with a clatter of wings loud almost as a pistol shot in the morning quiet, a policeman came into sight. He rounded a far corner and came towards David at his slow policeman's pace as if two great lead weights were swinging inside his legs.

David stayed fixed to the spot. And the knowledge blossomed

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inside him that when the constable reached him he would have to have chosen. He tried to find reasons for taking one course or the other, for breaching the edifice of family trust (even though Cousin Edna was not really part of it) or for gleefully handing over the hated one to retribution (when somehow the retribution seemed, obscure and terrible, too much for the offense).

Already the constable was standing on the far side of the little turning twenty yards away. David felt he was being stared at with an all-seeing, penetrating vision. Would he be asked what he was doing out at this time of the morning? What could he say?

Now the constable was looking slowly to left and right. And now he was crossing. David went cold as leaden ice. And the policeman, turning his head just a little, gave him a single calm regard and walked past.

"Please," David said. "Please."

The constable stopped and turned slowly round.

"Well, sonny?"

David swallowed.

"Please," he said, "I want to report a spy."

"Do you now?" said the constable.

He didn't grin or anything, but David knew he was partly amused and partly ready to stamp on any cheekiness that went a hairsbreadth too far. Desperately he thrust the dark oily-paper envelope upwards.

"This," he said. "It was in this tree. I saw her put it there."

To his relief the policeman did at least take the envelope and even examine it. And he must have caught a glimpse of the strip of film under the broken flap because suddenly a little frown crossed his face and he turned the envelope upside down, slid out the strip, and held it up between a big red finger and thumb. Then he looked down at David with quite a different expression on his face.

"You say you saw a woman place this in the tree here?" he asked.

"Yes," said David in a croaky whisper.

"Would you be able to recognize the lady again if you saw her?"

"Oh, yes. She's my—" David stopped. "Yes," he said. "I would recognize her because I've seen her before. I think she comes here on visits."

"Well, now," said the constable, "perhaps you'd better just step along to the station with me and tell them all about it there."

At the police station David assured a coaxingly friendly policewoman that he wouldn't be missed at home, as he often went out

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by himself on summer mornings, and accepted a cup of very sweet tea. He was offered a pile of battered comics to read. He had gone through four of them, not skipping at all, when the policewoman came back with Mr. Lummox.

Mr. Lummox was a big shambling-looking man who wore a belted buff-colored mackintosh that had seen better days. His large brick-red face with two small blue eyes in it looked a little flustered. He sat down with a grunt of tiredness and at once began asking about the envelope.

Before long David had to admit to himself that an unthinkable suspicion he had begun to have almost from the very start was right: Mr. Lummox was not really at all clever. For one thing, he kept switching from asking questions in ridiculous baby-talk to using words David just didn't understand. And then several times he showed quite plainly that he hadn't really been listening to the answers.

So David felt no qualms at all when he realized that he could prevent his parents ever knowing who had told the police about Cousin Edna by, instead of giving his own name and address, saying that he was Jimmy Smith and lived at No. 3 in a street four turnings away. He had come to the conclusion, after giving the matter thought, that the government could easily recognize the photographed plans as coming from the place where Cousin Edna worked and that no one else would have put them in that particular tree.

When Mr. Lummox abruptly blundered out and the policewoman came back, David accepted a ride in a police car to the corner of his own street, confident that Mr. Lummox wouldn't have passed on the false address.

His jaunty mood lasted until he set foot inside his front door. And then, suddenly, the awfulness of it all surged up and overwhelmed him. He bolted up to his room, heaved the door shut behind him, and plunged into the narrow space between the chest-of-drawers and the wall where he was accustomed to crouch in desperate moments and where, he believed, nobody ever thought of looking for him.

Yet, quick as his dash had been, he had been unable not to hear Cousin Edna's voice coming from the kitchen. Worse, even, when it came to lunchtime he had to go down and sit opposite her. He hardly ate a thing and couldn't bring himself to cast the briefest of glances at Cousin Edna, not even when she spoke to him.

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"Ah," she said, "who's getting a little bit bashful with the girls? My little Davy-dee didn't used to be so shy. He used to go with his old Cousin Ed—"

It was then that the front doorbell rang. David's mother went to answer it and came back looking slightly puzzled. "It's for you, Edna," she said. "A Mr. Lummox."

Cousin Edna went out, murmuring that she couldn't imagine what anybody would want with little her in great big London town.

Then after a bit she called back that she would have to go out for a wee few minutes.

David felt as if he had been sitting watching a film on television and the set had suddenly stopped working. There was a great unexpected blank. It was suddenly all over. But what he had done was still there. He had betrayed Cousin Edna. An iron collar seemed to have been fastened round his neck to weigh achingly on his shoulders.

The first chance he got he slid up to his room again, seized a favorite old comic book, and wriggled himself far to the back of his narrow hiding place.

He was still there, just beginning on the book a second time, when he heard the front door open and, a moment later, a terrible, terribly familiar voice calling out, "Yoo hoo! Anybody at home?"

He sat rigid with horror, straining to hear what explanation Cousin Edna was giving his mother down in the kitchen. But all too soon the voice ceased. And the door of his room opened.

"Out you come, Davy-dee. Old Edna knows exactly where you like to tuck yourself away."

As if he were a stringed puppet, David got to his feet and moved out into the room.

"Well now," Cousin Edna said, "who was a clever little boy and gave a wrong name to the police? And who never guessed that he'd met a very sensible old P.C. who saw he was keeping something back and told his friends in the car to keep a watchout?"

"Please— Please—" David gasped.

"Yes," Cousin Edna said, "I don't expect you thought you would see me again for a very long time, did you?"

She gave a little giggle, like a rusty key squeaking in a lock.

"But what you could never have known," she went on, "was that your old Cousin Edna had been asked by a very high-up gentleman in M.I.5 to pretend to give away a few little secrets to a nasty man

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who had asked her for them so that later she could give away some big, big secrets that were quite, quite wrong."

It was then that Cousin Edna told him what a dead-letter drop was and how she had just been with Mr. Lummox to restore the narrow envelope to its proper place. And though David squirmed inwardly at the manner of her telling, he nevertheless felt spreading up inside him a quiet and singing joy. The iron collar that he had thought he would never get rid of had suddenly disappeared into thin air.

"And you were a very brave boy, my Davy-dee," Cousin Edna concluded. "It was brave of you to tell the policeman that the Cousin Edna you love so much was really a beastly spy."

She gave him a smile that curled up the corners of her candle-grease face till it looked as if she might be fixed like that forever. And then she added something else.

"We won't say a single word about it, shall we? Not one word, either of us. My little Davy-dee's splendid act shall be our very own secret."

David did not reply. But round his shoulders he felt descending another collar of iron. And this one, he knew, nothing could ever lift off.

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The year is 1851. The place is a way station cum trading post established by an enterprising Mormon for the convenience of those making their way north from Salt Lake to the California Trail. The cast of characters consists of a score of stranded travelers taking refuge from a violent Rocky Mountain storm . . .

SPIRIT WEATHER

by JACK TRACY

Ghosts again, children? You're wasting your time speculating on such things. The ruined house up on Hallard Street is no more haunted than this one is. There are no such things as ghosts.

Well, yes, perhaps I *am* the most obstinate man in San Francisco. I'm also the wealthiest, and if you believe there's no link between the two then you don't know your old grandfather as well as you think you do.

And you puff hot air when you say I hold my opinion because I've never had a spiritualistic experience. You know I base my beliefs on my own ken and nothing else. Of *course* I've had a ghostly experience—one that would stand your hair on end and send you shrieking beneath the bedcovers.

Of course I'll tell you the story.

I was a young man at the time, not yet twenty. The year was 1851—my mercy, fifty-five years ago to the month. San Francisco was just a muddy gold camp in those days—we had no fear of earthquakes then. I saw the town grow up and last April I saw it fall down. I guess that may signal the end of me too. When you kids are as old as I am, they'll ask you about the San Francisco Earthquake same as you ask me about the Gold Rush.

All right—this is a ghost story. Let's all assume a solemn, significant air. Switch off the electricity and light a gas lamp. Listen to it hiss. Imagine the foul things whose mouth would put out a sound like that. It's much like what I did hear, in the dark, myself fifty-five years ago.

I hadn't seen San Francisco yet. I grew up in Illinois, as you know,

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and for two years we watched the flood of emigrants passing through, bound for California and Oregon and places in between, and finally we could stand it no longer. In the summer of 1851, my two brothers and I joined a small wagon party bound for the Pacific Slope.

We couldn't have picked a worse time. I say we were a small party, but you wouldn't have known it from the sight of things. As far as the eye could see, east and west along the River Platte, there were wagons and people. That's no exaggeration. The isolated wagon train upon the lonely plains may be a romantic picture, but it's fantasy. We were elbow-to-rib all the way from Council Bluffs to Fort Laramie, so thick that often there was a shortage of grass for the animals.

We followed the north side of the Platte, along the so-called Mormon Trail, because most folks kept to the south bank, even the Mormons. We weren't worried about Indians—they kept away. They were afraid of the cholera, which was especially bad that year.

We were fifty-one days getting to Laramie. That was good time, considering how unprepared we were. We were unprepared for the numbers of emigrants. We were unprepared for the cholera. We were unprepared for the cold in the Rocky Mountains in the middle of summer. We were unprepared for the irrational greed of the Western trails.

West of Laramie, once you cross the Continental Divide at South Pass, the trail branches into three. You could go south along the Green River to Great-Salt-Lake City and get a taste of civilization, which is what many did after toiling over the Divide. You could take the Oregon route up to the Northwest. Or you could do as we did and follow the middle trail along the Bear River toward California.

It was no trouble keeping to the trail. Like two straggling lines of curbstone, abandoned possessions by the ton lay on either side of the track. I can't begin to describe for you the variety of goods to be found there, and after a day lost examining all the items we couldn't carry ourselves we pretty much lost interest in it all—it just became another part of the landscape.

You'd think people would be lightening their loads going up the Divide, but it was on the down side that they began to throw out their things. They felt they were close to the gold fields now. The gold fever took them. They lightened their wagons and whipped up their horses, and more of them died in the Nevada deserts and the California Sierras than ever came to grief in the Rockies.

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We were caught up in the madness too. Among the household goods and farm implements, we found whole barrels of flour and foodstuffs abandoned along the roadside. These we took up and sold farther down the trail to the same hungry travelers who'd likely thrown them away in the first place. The prices they were willing to pay were most wonderful and, having cleared three hundred dollars, we were carried away and began to sell our own flour too. Soon we hadn't enough for ourselves. We had to hunt game then.

We were to take turns, and I was sent out first because I was the poorest huntsman. If I failed, it would be less critical early than late when we might have no food at all to fall back on.

And I did fail. I tramped about the mountains nearly the whole day and saw not even a squirrel. I was just turning back when I was caught in a thunderstorm.

Until you've been in a Rocky Mountain storm, you can't imagine the sudden violence of the thing. It blows up out of nowhere without warning. The wind rages and the lightning crashes about your ears, you're so near the clouds. The rain is freezing cold and comes at you sidewise in measured bursts, like a switching from some cosmic schoolmaster. You find yourself clutching at your clothes for fear they'll be torn from your body. You huddle behind a rock while the wind roars and the trees pop, and when it's over you're cold, exhausted, and feeling half drowned, as if you'd just swum a river.

It was dark now, and overcast, and I couldn't find my way. Twice more during the night I was blasted by storms. I was too nerve-shattered to sleep, too afraid I'd freeze to death to stop moving. I blundered about in fits of desperate energy, getting myself thoroughly lost, and as soon as the sun was up I collapsed and slept.

By the time I awoke it was late afternoon, and the whole nightmarish experience started over. Another thunderstorm came howling through, the night closed in—I was drenched and buffeted. I was well famished now, weak from hunger and terror, convinced my time had come. I like to sobbed with relief when, during a lull between storms, I saw a light and stumbled toward it.

The place turned out to be a way station cum trading post, established by an enterprising Mormon named Fritch for the convenience of those making their way north from Salt Lake back to the California Trail. It was full of a score of stranded travelers like myself, all taking refuge from the storm, which now seemed to have blown over.

It was no hotel, and there were no beds, but there was warmth

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and there was food. There was plenty of companionship, too, and I was grateful just to see a human face again. I ate my fill and bought a round of beer for the house, such was my relief. I still had some money left from our flour-scavenging.

There was a big Frenchman there with a black beard up to his cheekbones and pale-grey eyes you could hardly turn your gaze away from, who told me he was a trapper for the American Fur Company. He took me under his wing and made room for me near the fire to dry out. He had impressed me immediately with his masterful manner and his quiet, ever-smiling arrogance. All of us sensed it. He dominated the company without once appearing to make the effort.

We sat in a semicircle about the fireplace and smoked. The conversation naturally fell to the storm and the fearful weather of the Rockies. Every man there, it seemed, had had some little adventure to relate. One man had actually been blown off his horse. A party of Dutchmen had been half a day getting six wagons across a regular river of mud. None of us, it seemed, had known what we were in for when we'd set out from Fort Laramie.

"It's a wild country, it's true, and wild weather to match," remarked Fritch.

"It's horrendous weather," someone said.

"A cursèd climate," agreed another.

"*Spookachtig weer,*" intoned one of the Dutchmen.

"Spirit weather," translated a companion.

"True enough," spoke up a young fellow sitting down on the cusp of our semicircle. "If there are spirits in the world, they were walking abroad tonight."

"Now, there you're wrong," said my Frenchman, speaking for the first time.

We all looked to him in some surprise.

"Do not confuse the violence of Nature for a manifestation of that which transcends Nature," the big man continued in a calm voice. The fluency of his English was unexpected, given the thickness of his accent. "The true spirit prefers a motionless atmosphere. And he is all the more terrible for that."

We were a little taken aback at his eloquence and the conviction with which he spoke. There was an instant of silence. Then the pup on the end burst out with a peal of mocking laughter. "Well, that's good!" he cried. "Do they make their preferences known to you personally? Or do you hide in the bushes and watch them mooning about the crossroads, flicking the mud from their ghostly shrouds?"

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"Young man, I would advise you not to speak mockingly of such things."

"Would you set your phantoms on me then?" the young fellow chuckled.

"You're young," the Frenchman replied. "You don't know what you're talking about."

And with the bravado of the young, the pup sprang to his feet, dramatically tossing back his chair and leveling a finger at the trapper. "If you were anything more than a crazy hermit, I'd make you pay for that remark!" he exclaimed.

"Easy, son," our host said. "He's three times your size."

"I'm no more afraid of him than his hobgoblins!"

"It is of no importance whether you fear me," the Frenchman said in his quiet way. "But this is a matter of which I have a lifetime of experience—you would do well to show no contempt for the spirits of the dead."

"All right then!" cried the youth. "Will you set 'em on me? *Can you?*"

"I have that power."

"Bah!" The youngster wrestled a leathern wallet out of his shirt and he threw it on the floor before the trapper. "There's five dollars, all the money I've got in the world, and that gold says you're a liar and a fraud!"

The trapper didn't touch the money, but he too got to his feet. The young man's taunts were having their effect on him. "I have no gold," he said. "Only furs—bear and beaver—in the care of the good Fritch, under lock and key in his cupboard yonder."

Fritch nodded agreement. Three or four others acknowledged they'd seen the Frenchman bring the peltry in and store them away.

"They're worth thirty dollars at the least," the trapper said. "Can you match that?"

"Five is all I've got," the pup said angrily.

The Frenchman shrugged. "Then there is no wager." And he sat down. It was clear he was trying to bluff his way out of proving his claim to supernatural skills, and not for the first time I found myself irritated by his manner.

"Do you really think you can start a ghost?" I asked him.

"I have that power," he repeated. "The spirits of the departed seek my will. It is my curse. It is the reason I live alone in this wilderness."

I didn't believe him. "I'll take ten dollars of that bet," I said, and, taking up the poke from the floor, I counted out two five-dollar gold

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pieces of my own. The wallet I lay in my lap, and upon the wallet I placed the two half eagles so that all could see my wealth.

"You see that?" the Frenchman asked the young fellow. "I *will* set the spirits upon you, my doubting young chicken, if only for a lesson. Within one hour, I will bring before you the shade of one you have known. You will recognize him. He will speak to you. He will teach you respect for the dead, or you will forfeit your sanity."

"I still have only five dollars," the youngster told him.

The other pointed at me. "Fifteen."

"Here, now," someone said, reaching into his jacket, "I'll cover three."

"I'll find you three," said another. In less than a minute, ruffled by the Frenchman's conceit and curious to see what was going to happen next, we had matched the thirty dollars at which the trapper's furs were valued.

"Give the money to the boy," he ordered. "Let him hold the stakes. I want the satisfaction of receiving it from his own hand when he is afraid to face the apparition."

The young man snorted in derision.

The giant took the fifteen dollars from my lap and handed it to the pup, who added to it the rest of the gold we had collected and tucked it away in an inside pocket.

"Come along then," the trapper said. "Out back there is a smith's house. We will use that."

The blacksmith's shack was a little earthen-floored outbuilding, not much bigger than a horse's stall, where Fritch kept his portable forge, an anvil, and some spare tackle. It had a wide door in front, barred with a stout piece of timber, and a tiny window, unglazed but too small for a man to pass through, high up in the rear wall opposite. There were no openings on the sides.

At the Frenchman's insistence, we inspected the place thoroughly and found nothing out of order. The Frenchman placed a pencil and a scrap of paper atop the anvil and, herding the rest of us outside, shut the door upon the disbeliever. The last I saw of the young fellow before the door shut he was standing, hands on hips and a knowing smile on his face, on the other side of the anvil beneath the window, the moonlight streaming in and haloing him in its pale glow.

The trapper set the bar in place on the outside of the door and stood before it, facing us, those wonderfully piercing grey eyes riveting each of us in turn. The night was silent, with not even the call

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of a bird to break the hush that follows upon a storm. The air was still and cold and damp as a tomb's.

Without warning, the Frenchman's eyes rolled back in his head and he raised his hands above his head, bent at the wrists, fingers hooked like the talons of some gargoyles I've seen. He began to chant in a low melancholy voice. It was not French he spoke, nor Latin, nor did it sound like an Indian dialect. I've heard religious fanatics in my time who claimed a gift of tongues and it wasn't their kind of babbling either. It was a real language, or it sounded like one, but to this day I couldn't name it.

After a few minutes' chanting, he spoke in English. Still in his trance, the whites only of his eyes visible, he called out, "What do you see?"

We heard the young fellow reply from inside the shed. "There's a white mist forming inside here, up by the window."

It's only the glow of the moonlight, I thought.

"Does it alarm you?" asked the Frenchman.

"No, not at all," the young man said in a perfectly composed voice.

With a start, almost involuntarily, the Frenchman began to chant again. Again he paused before speaking. "What do you see?" he demanded.

We listened anxiously for the skeptic's answer, for the slightest hint of nervousness in his voice. But there was none. His tone was calm, measured. "The vapor is moving—churning slowly —lengthening. I can't tell whether it's descending from the window or coming up out of the ground."

Yes, it's the moonlight, I smiled to myself. The Frenchman's got the boy's imagination playing tricks on him.

"It's condensing," the youngster reported. "It's taking on a form—the shape of a man. Why, it's Bud Wood, who died of the cholera not five weeks back. I recognize his check trousers and the Indian blanket we buried him in. It's still wrapped around him. His face is covered, but it's Bud. It's his hair. There's the fingernail missing from the hand he caught in the coffee mill when we were kids."

"Are you afraid of it?" asked the Frenchman.

"No," came the reply without hesitation. "Why should I be afraid of Bud Wood, who's been my friend all my life?" There was a brief pause. "He just stands there, with his face covered."

The trapper seemed to smile in his trance and took to chanting again, his contorted hands still held aloft, his eyeballs rolled back,

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his broad back to the smithy. This time the incantation was shorter, the same phrases repeated over in various sequences.

The rest of us stood transfixed. The cold mountain air tickled the back of my neck.

And as the Frenchman intoned his plainsong, we heard a rattle and a thump, as though someone were moving about the shack. "What do you see?"

This time the boy's voice came to us from just beyond the door, as if he had maneuvered to get the anvil between him and the phantom he described.

"He's moved now. He's at the anvil. He's written something on the paper. Now he—he—"

"What do you see?"

"He's flicking the mud from his shroud—from the Indian blanket, I mean!"

"Are you afraid?"

"No! It's incredible! But I'm not afraid!"

Well, I was afraid. My heart was going like a steam-hammer. Every man's mouth was standing open, his eyes bugging out of his head, and I saw one of the Dutchmen make the sign of the cross.

The Frenchman cried out again, the same phrase repeated three times in a hoarse high-pitched refrain.

"What do you see?" he howled.

The young man's voice was chillingly composed by comparison. It was almost as if their respective temperaments had been transposed, one into the other. "He's coming around the anvil toward me," he said.

I could hear the thing breathing!

It was true. I could *hear* the steady hiss of its breath, in and out, in and out, in long, inhuman sighs never made by living flesh. I *heard* it approach the door.

"He stands before me," said the young man. There was a tremor in his throat now, no doubt about it, but whether of fear or exaltation I wouldn't have wished to hazard.

"He reaches to his head. Ah—he unwraps the blankets to reveal—his face—"

"Are you afraid?" shrieked the Frenchman.

The young man's simultaneous response was a corresponding scream of utter terror that stood my hair on end. There was a frantic battering on the barred door from within, and we heard the pup crying, "Don't touch me, don't touch me, don't *touch* me!" in an

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unbroken wail of torment—then a piteous moan, another crash, and silence.

We had stood frozen with horror, I for one only just resisting the compulsion to run for it, but now we threw ourselves upon the door in an effort to free the young man. But the trapper, still in his trance, had collapsed back against it, pinning the wooden bar in its sockets, holding the door shut. He didn't resist us, but his size hindered our exertions for several moments. At last we succeeded in flinging him bodily to one side and burst into the shack.

Inside, we found the youngster's unconscious body on the dirt floor. Some pieces of harness had been knocked down in his struggle. Upon the piece of paper on the anvil was scrawled the signature *Wm Wood* in an uncertain hand.

The pup began to revive as we carried him out into the cold air, mumbling and thrashing about in a kind of delirium. We laid him upon the ground, but someone suggested he might suffer from the exposure so we lifted him again and brought him into the keeping room of the trading post. There on the deerskin hearthrug, in fits and rants, he quickly came to himself and rose up, breathing hard, his eyes wild.

"Where is he?" were the first words he spoke. "Where's that damned Frenchman!"

We all looked about, but the trapper was nowhere to be seen. No one could recall him coming inside. Fritch and I were going to go look for him, but the boy stopped us with frantic gestures. "No, no! I don't want to see him!" he cried. "I couldn't face his blasted smirk! He's won his bet! Let it go!"

A sudden recollection flashed across his face. In a sort of paroxysm of revulsion, he hauled the money bag out of his shirt and flung it upon the table. "There!" he shrieked, like one demented. "Take it for him! Take it all! Stay away! Leave me alone!" And he burst out the front door, leaving us standing there in confusion. Within seconds, we heard the sound of horse's hooves fading away into the still night.

So, you see, there are no ghosts. Eventually, as we waited for the Frenchman to return and claim his winnings, someone opened the poke and found it filled with worthless scrap-iron plugs. The pelts in the cupboard were blankets, such as could be picked up by the ton along the trails, wrapped in a single carrion bearskin. Searching the blacksmith's shed again, we found the hand-bellows with which

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the pup had made the sound of the phantom's breath. The remainder of the apparition we had conjured for ourselves out of our credulous imaginations and the superb performances of the two conspirators.

They had made off with twenty-five dollars—ten of them mine—for their night's work, enough to support them for a month or more while they searched out more pickings. But they left me an experience I could learn from, and cheap at the price. I never heard mention of either of them again, but here I am, the richest man in San Francisco—and I don't believe in ghosts. And I never will.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

DOUBLE JEOPARDY

by WILLIAM GALVIN

Don't tell me that the butler's guilty.
Or that the stranger is to blame.
If you have read the book before me,
Withhold, I plead, the villain's name.
I like to match my wits with authors,
And dig out clues they try to hide.
It irritates to have you tell me
Who's guilty of the homicide.
I mean this, friend, so heed the warning,
Give it more than casual look,
Or we'll end up with double murders,
One in and one outside the book.

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a *NEW* Jericho story by

HUGH PENTECOST

John Jericho, the crusader for justice, the painter who hunts down perpetrators of evil, all 240 pounds of him, mind and muscle, brain and brawn, a modern red-bearded Viking avenger—John Jericho is a raging nemesis, but he won't let an innocent person be punished and a guilty one go free . . .

ACT OF VIOLENCE

by HUGH PENTECOST

Warmth and friendship and a debt of gratitude brought Jericho to a place of greed and violence and pointless death. John Jericho, an artist of international fame, has devoted the recent years of his life to a crusade against terrorism and senseless violence. He uses his enormous talents, his brilliant colors, his horrifying designs, his slashing brush strokes, to cry out against man's inhumanity to man. He searches for evil to expose it—in the streets of Teheran, in Egypt, in the north of Ireland, in a bus terminal in Israel, at the sites of bombings and hijackings, arsons, and hostage holdings. Without speaking an audible word, he makes his message clear all across the civilized world.

Jericho hunts down the perpetrators of violence, but he sometimes thinks that crime searches him out, almost deliberately. The last place in the world, however, that he expected to encounter violence was in Martin Fair's walled-in garden in the foothills of the Berkshires in northwest Connecticut on a lazy, warm summer afternoon.

Martin Fair was a man in his middle sixties who had devoted his life to the world of Art. He had been Jericho's teacher in the early days of the artist's career, and Jericho loved him, owed him, and was delighted to come to the town of Lakeview to help celebrate a

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great moment in Martin Fair's career. Tomorrow the older man would be appointed managing director of the Willis Harmon Art Foundation. He would be in control of a fabulous Art Gallery, a theater presenting drama, music, and ballet, and a series of workshops for young and old in a wide spectrum of the arts. Willis Harmon, the multimillionaire creator of the Foundation, had made sure that everyone of any importance in the Art World would be present for the occasion by announcing that he had bought for the Foundation and would show to the public for the first time a painting by Vincent van Gogh.

"How can a van Gogh never have been seen before?" Jericho asked. "He's been dead for nearly a hundred years."

"He committed suicide in 1890," Martin Fair said, puffing contentedly on his pipe.

The contrast in appearance between Fair and Jericho was startling. Martin Fair was thin, almost delicate, and white-haired; he had gentle brown eyes and a warm, fatherly smile. Jericho is six feet four inches tall, weighs 240 pounds of bone and muscle, has flaming red hair, beard, and mustache that make him look like a legendary Viking warrior.

The third man sitting on the sunlit terrace of Martin Fair's garden that afternoon was still another type—small, plump, butterball-round, with a stomach that jiggled when he laughed, which was often. He was egg-bald, and his cold blue eyes suggested that he was constantly studying and evaluating the people who confronted him. Peter Hoff was multimillionaire Willis Harmon's European agent, on a constant hunt for new art treasures for the Foundation. It was Peter Hoff who had discovered the heretofore unknown van Gogh.

"Van Gogh was only thirty-seven when he died," Hoff said. He had a very slight, Germanic-sounding accent.

"And became so popular that every single thing he ever painted must have been pawed over for more than ninety years," Jericho said.

"Not this one," Hoff said. He laughed, and his stomach jiggled. He handled a cigar carefully, as though it was alive and his pudgy fingers might crush it. "Extraordinary piece of luck. When you see it unveiled tomorrow, Mr. Jericho, you will know just how extraordinary."

"Tell John how you found it, Peter," Martin Fair suggested.

"Astonishing piece of luck," Hoff said. "You may know that van Gogh sold almost none of his paintings during his lifetime. He was

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psychotic, half mad, believed in his greatness but didn't let himself live to see his work recognized. Terrible fits of depression. At one time he actually cut off one of his ears, a self-mutilation to match his deep depression.

"We know all this from letters he wrote to his brother Theo. Without Theo he would never have produced the work he did. Theo supported him, both economically and with his faith in the paintings. But there must have been a time when Vincent and Theo had a falling out, or Theo had gone somewhere and couldn't be reached. Vincent found a Dutch family who were willing to give shelter to a young man who didn't have a penny to his name and must have seemed quite mad to them.

"The family took him in, fed him, listened to his crazy talk. At one point he gave them a painting to pay for his board and room. The man of the house was a Dutch canal-barge captain, with absolutely no knowledge of art. He accepted the painting but assumed it had no value at all. He put it up in the attic of his house and there it stayed, for nearly a hundred years, unthought of, unremembered."

"But when van Gogh became famous?" Jericho asked.

"The old captain was long dead. His children, his heirs, whoever, never knew of van Gogh's gift. The attic became a catch-all for generations of the captain's family, without anyone knowing what was stored away there—only that it was stuff nobody wanted. Well, a new grandchild, or great-grandchild, recently inherited the house. It was decided to empty out the attic, and so they held—I suppose you'd call it—a street sale. The van Gogh was carried out to the sidewalk along with grandpa's rubber boots, his sea chest, and stacks of old clothes and other worthless memorabilia." Hoff's stomach jiggled.

"Imagine!" Martin Fair said. "A van Gogh, stacked on the sidewalk outside an old house!"

"By the sheerest coincidence a young Dutch art student was passing by when the sale was in progress. People in the neighborhood were fumbling around in piles of old clothes and junk hoping to find something worth buying. No one was interested in the painting. Van Gogh was an expressionist. The picture, believe it or not, must be in his *The Starry Night* period—great swirls of color, with crude, almost childlike drawings of buildings in the distant background. The swirls of color suggest the turmoil in van Gogh's troubled mind."

"*The Starry Night* was painted in 1889," Martin Fair said. "The last active year of van Gogh's career. He died in 1890."

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"The old barge captain must have thought it was infantile nonsense," Hoff said, enthusiastic about his story. "But not our art student. He stood looking at the painting, his heart almost stopping for a moment, then nearly pounding its way out of his chest. He knew he was looking at a van Gogh! He deprecated it to the family, bought it for a few guilders, and went off with a fortune under his arm."

"Once in a lifetime," Martin Fair said.

Hoff continued. "Our student took his time, confirmed that van Gogh had once stayed in the captain's house. Some old crone remembered. Experts then authenticated the painting. It was a genuine van Gogh—a masterpiece. Our art student notified a few buyers for collectors, told them what he had. I was one of them. A bidding war began."

"How much did you pay for it?" Jericho asked.

Hoff laughed. "Mr. Harmon has sworn me to secrecy about the price he paid. But I can give you a hint, Mr. Jericho. In 1980 a van Gogh was auctioned off in New York City—at Sotheby's, I think—for a million and a half dollars. That will give you a starting point for any guess you care to make."

Jericho stared at the little expert. "For that kind of money I can paint you a dozen van Goghs that you couldn't tell from the real thing!" he said.

"With what, John?" Martin Fair asked.

"With what's in my paint box," Jericho said. "Van Gogh should be easy to imitate because he isn't literal."

Martin Fair smiled. "Do you know how van Gogh mixed his colors?"

"No, but—"

"An expert would expose you in ten minutes, John, if you used what's in your paint box. The paints you use today contain ingredients van Gogh never dreamed of. A little scraping in one corner, a chemical examination, and you're out of business. And how would you age the canvas?"

Peter Hoff was enjoying himself. "That's my job, knowing what to look for. Not long ago I was offered a painting by Albert Ryder, the American artist, in mint condition. Maybe Martin can tell you how I knew it was a forgery."

Fair nodded. "Because there is no such thing as a 'mint condition' Ryder," he said. "Ryder died in 1917, by the way. He was a great artist but not a conscientious craftsman. He used different paints

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that dried at different speeds, creating tensions that finally pulled the surface of the canvas to pieces, a confusion of cracking paints. Fortunately, his dark, moody paintings make the damage not too awful. Small comfort, but no perfect Ryder could exist."

"Totally correct," Hoff said.

He had lost Martin Fair's attention, however. The older man's face had clouded over and he rose, abruptly, from his wicker armchair. Moving across the lower end of the garden toward the house was a young man with long hair; he was wearing blue jeans and a gaudy sports shirt.

"Klint!" Martin Fair called out.

The young man stopped and turned. Jericho was aware of almost fierce black eyes narrowed against the afternoon sun. He was well built, about six feet tall, solid and muscular-looking. His mouth curved down at the corners in an expression of contempt; he raised his right arm and brought it down in a "drop dead" gesture, then started on toward the house.

"Klint!" Martin Fair's voice was unsteady with anger. "Take one more step toward that house and I call the State Police!"

The young man hesitated, turned, and started toward the three men watching him from the terrace.

"What's up, Martin?" Jericho asked.

"A worthless punk named Klint has been paying unwelcome attention to my granddaughter, Betsy," Fair said. "I've warned him off the place."

Klint reached the terrace, a menacing figure. "Listen, you old creep," he said. "Betsy's of age, you know? If she wants to see me she's got a right, you know?"

"I've warned you for the last time," Martin Fair said.

"So try heaving me out!" Klint said.

He was suddenly confronted by a giant redhead with a bristling red beard. "By proxy," Jericho said. He reached out, took the young man by both upper arms, and lifted him off the ground. "You can go quietly, buster, or I can throw you over the wall." With Klint's feet off the ground the two men were eye to eye. "And don't try kicking my shins or I just might jam those pretty white teeth down your throat!"

Klint, a big man, struggled without results. "I'll get you for this!" he shouted.

"You asked for it, chum," Jericho said. He carried the helpless Klint to the edge of the terrace and heaved him, unceremoniously,

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over the low stone wall. There was the sound of crushed shrubbery and then Klint popped up on the other side. His face was white with rage. "I'll be squaring accounts with you, Mister, and with the old jerk over there, too," he said in a shaking voice.

Jericho put his hand on top of the wall. "Right now, if you want me to join you," he said.

There was a change in the expression on Klint's face. He wheeled and ran toward the highway. At the same moment Jericho felt someone tugging at him from behind. He turned and found himself facing a strikingly lovely young woman.

"You had no right to do that, Uncle John!" the girl said.

Uncle John! That was a title given to adult friends of the family. This had to be Betsy Carson, Martin Fair's granddaughter. The last time Jericho had seen her she'd been a beautiful five-year-old child. Lord, how time passes!

"You humiliated him!" Betsy said.

"Your friend needed a lesson in manners, Betsy," Jericho said.

"This is *my* house!" the girl said, and ran quickly away from the terrace, leaving the three men together.

"You handled him as if he were a child," Peter Hoff said. "My God, Jericho, I'd hate to meet you in a dark alley."

Jericho was waiting for what had to be an explanation from Martin Fair.

"Technically this is Betsy's house," Fair said, after a few moments. "As you both know, my daughter and son-in-law were killed in a plane accident—what is it, seventeen years ago? Under the terms of Bob Carson's will I became Betsy's legal guardian. The house was left to her, with the understanding that I would live here and raise her here until she reached her nineteenth birthday. That was a month ago. After tomorrow I will be taking up my new living quarters at the Foundation. Betsy and I had a wonderful 'growing up' together until about a year ago. That's when Bubba Klint came into her life."

"Bubba?" Hoff asked. "I've never heard such a name."

"Nickname," Fair said. "Big college football player. I don't know what Klint's first name really is. I found him objectionable—he belongs to a generation of young people I don't understand. I suspect him of using drugs and he obviously has a physical interest in Betsy. I urged Betsy to break off with him. I refused to let him come here to the house to see her. But a month ago—when she became nineteen—she passed out of any legal control I had. This *is* her house.

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Technically I no longer have any right to say who should come here to see her, whom she should have for friends. But it's hard, after all these years—" Fair stopped, shaking his head from side to side. "I love her so very much."

"Life changes," Hoff said. "In an hour or so you will see the van Gogh. Tomorrow you will become its guardian—it will be a new and important life for you. The girl will wake up to the real nature of this young man, sooner or later. But the way Jericho handled him!"

"Do I get to see the van Gogh when it arrives?" Jericho asked.

"No one but Martin sees it until tomorrow," Hoff said.

Martin Fair had arranged well in advance for a room for Jericho at the local inn, The Red Cardinal. It was good that he had because the small New England town was suddenly bulging at the seams with people from the world of Art, to celebrate a good man's elevation to a post of importance and to be present at the unveiling of a van Gogh never before seen. Martin Fair himself had not seen the painting until after that moment of violence in his garden involving his granddaughter's boy friend.

Jericho left his friend and teacher shortly after that moment. Fair was headed for the Foundation's Art Gallery with Peter Hoff to inspect the new art treasure. It was brought up from New York in an armored vehicle. A million and a half dollars was only the starting guess at its possible value. Jericho had teased Hoff to be allowed to have a preview of the painting, but Willis Harmon had issued strict orders. Not even the President of the United States would be allowed to see it before its ceremonial presentation the next day. Only Martin Fair could see it since he would have to make the formal presentation speech at the ceremony.

The late afternoon and evening were not dull for Jericho. Many friends and acquaintances had arrived in town. He dined with some of them at the inn, and spent the evening in the crowded grillroom, drinking and joking and exchanging anecdotes. He retired to his comfortable room a little after midnight, while others searched for vacant motel rooms, or roominghouse space, or a place somewhere under the star-lit summer sky.

There was a brisk knocking on the door of Jericho's room. He'd left an early call but it was still dark. He switched on the bedside light and glanced at his wristwatch. It was only a few minutes before four in the morning. The knocking continued.

Jericho got out of bed, pulled on his robe, and went to the door.

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It could, he thought, be a fire or some other kind of emergency. He opened the door and found himself facing a man in the uniform of a state trooper.

"John Jericho?"

"Yes."

"You're a friend of Martin Fair's, I believe."

"Yes."

"I have some rather shocking news for you, Mr. Jericho. Martin Fair is dead. It's a homicide."

Jericho tried to step back from the door but felt frozen to the spot. "Dead! My God!" he said.

"I'm Sergeant Walters," the trooper said. "Captain Southworth would appreciate your coming to the barracks with me."

"I don't understand," Jericho said. He stepped back and let the trooper into the room.

"We've arrested a suspect," the trooper said. "We understand you had some kind of a run-in with him earlier in the day. The Captain wants to talk to you about it."

"You're talking about a kid named Klint?"

Walters nodded. "We understand you threw him bodily over the garden wall." His smile was tight. "I'd have enjoyed the chance. That creep has given us nothing but trouble. Now he's really done it."

Jericho began to dress. "Mind telling me just what happened?" he said.

"According to Mrs. Greer, the housekeeper, she heard Mr. Fair come home a little after midnight. She was already in bed, so she didn't actually see him, but she heard the garage door close. She dozed off and was awakened by the sound of shots. She's a country woman. She knows what a gunshot sounds like. But she supposed it was some kids monkeyin' around out in the woods. She'd been half asleep when she heard them and hadn't placed them. She was just dozing off again when she heard Betsy Carson, Fair's granddaughter, screaming, somewhere downstairs in the house.

"The housekeeper got up, put on her dressing gown, and started to go see what was happening. As she was passing her window she saw this Bubba Klint running off across the lawn. When she got downstairs to Mr. Fair's study she saw the old man on the floor, shot once in the head, once in the chest. Betsy Carson was telephoning for an ambulance. When that call was completed Mrs. Greer phoned for us at the barracks."

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"I suppose she asked what Klint was doing there?"

"She asked, but she says the girl appeared to be in shock. Didn't answer. Didn't have an answer for us when we questioned her later. But Klint had advertised what he intended to do."

"I don't follow," Jericho said.

"It seems after you heaved him out of there in the afternoon he took off for town, for one of the bars. He began taking on a tankful. He was yelling about getting even with Fair, getting even with you. He made a tour of the local bistros, getting drunker and drunker. By mid-evening everyone in town knew he was going to 'get' Mr. Fair and you. Nobody took him seriously. He's that kind of a blowhard. This time they should have."

"You've arrested him?"

Walters nodded. "Of course he denies it up and down, but he's still in pretty rough shape. Denies he was there, but Mrs. Greer saw him."

"Gun?"

"He got rid of it somewhere. We haven't found it yet."

"I don't know how I can help you," Jericho said, "but I'm ready to talk to your Captain if you wish me to."

"Mrs. Greer told us about your row with Klint," Walters said. "She saw it from her kitchen windows which look out over the garden. She says there was another man there with you. She doesn't know who he was and Betsy Carson can't or won't talk."

"Peter Hoff," Jericho said. "He's an art expert."

"Know where he might be staying?"

"He works for Willis Harmon. I'd expect he might be staying at the Harmon estate."

Walters made an entry in a small notebook. "Let's get going," he said.

Jericho, in his red Mercedes, followed the trooper's car to the barracks. Dawn was just beginning to light the sky in the east. He felt, he thought, as though someone had kicked him in the stomach. He had cared for Martin Fair, cared very much.

Something about Walters' story had rung a faintly sour note. He had studied patterns of violence for years. In his experience, except where politics were involved, the noisy threateners rarely implement their threats with violent action.

He had looked into Bubba Klint's dark eyes when he'd held him up off the ground. What he'd seen there was hurt vanity, not mad-

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ness. He could imagine Klint, drunk, coming back to Betsy's house in the middle of the night just to prove to himself—and possibly to Betsy—that he couldn't be ordered around. But to kill? Jericho felt he needed to know more before he could accept that explanation without question. Jericho had acted on hunches a good part of his life and he trusted them.

"You need to have more than a reputation for a loud mouth to convict a man for murder," he told Captain Southworth at the barracks.

Southworth was a familiar type, big, bronzed, muscular, unsmiling. "You threw him over a wall," Southworth said. "You have something on him?"

"He was trespassing. He was behaving offensively to an older man, my friend. He needed a lesson in manners."

"You're lucky," Southworth said. "We cops would need a court order to lay hands on him. Mr. Fair didn't tell you anything special about Klint?"

Jericho shrugged. "He suspected him of being on drugs. That's par for the course these days. He suspected he had physical designs on Betsy. He objected to that and had ordered him to stay off the property."

"Having designs on a girl who isn't jail bait is also par for the course," Southworth said.

Jericho smiled at him. "You're arguing my case," he said. "Find the gun, tie it to Klint, and I become a believer. Where is Betsy Carson now? I've known her since she was three years old. Maybe I can get through to her."

"I frankly don't buy this 'shock' condition that prevents her from talking," Southworth said. "Dr. Kelland admits it could be an act, and if it is her foot will slip sooner or later. Meanwhile she is technically under house arrest as a material witness."

"At her house?"

"Yes."

"Any objection to my talking to her?"

"Not if you'll share the results."

The cherished privacy that had once been a part of the climate at the Carson house was shattered. Jericho found four trooper cars parked in the driveway in addition to several private cars. Did they need an army to guard Betsy? He got the reason from a trooper at the front door.

"We're searching the grounds for the gun," the man told Jericho.

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"Figure Klint must have tossed it while he was making his getaway."

"Why would he? Better to ditch it far away from here."

"Girl was screaming, lights were popping on," the trooper said. "He must have thought he might be caught with it on him."

Jericho learned he was expected. Captain Southworth had phoned instructions for him to be taken to Betsy. In the front hall he found a middle-aged, pleasant-looking Dr. Kelland waiting for him.

"Know your work, Mr. Jericho. Admire it," the doctor said. "I also know a little bit of your history. You may be able to do more for Betsy than I can—if she trusts you."

"Not in shock?"

"I think not, but afraid to talk. You and I may not be in love with young Klint, but she is."

"No accounting for tastes," Jericho murmured.

He found Betsy in the living room, sitting on a window bench, looking out at the flowers and shrubs her grandfather had cared for and loved so much. She turned as she heard him approaching and a look of despair shadowed her face. She turned away again. Jericho stood just behind her.

"I want to help," he said.

She didn't respond or look at him.

"I have an educated instinct about violence, Betsy. I'm not satisfied that your young man is responsible for what's happened."

No reply.

"Could your housekeeper be confused about seeing him running off after the shots were fired?" A pause, and then: "You think I don't like your young man. I didn't like him the five minutes I saw him. But I don't want the innocent man punished and the guilty man going free."

She turned slowly. "I haven't been willing to talk because the police won't believe me, and if it comes to it, a jury won't believe me. They'll just think I'm trying to manufacture an alibi for Bubba."

"He was making love to you when the shots were fired?" Jericho suggested, very casual.

"Oh, my God, Uncle John!"

"That's how it was?"

She nodded. Now it came out in a flood. "Grandfather left here with Mr. Hoff about five o'clock to go to the Art Gallery. They were to receive the painting, the van Gogh. Grandfather came to the door of my room, told me he was going—would be gone for a couple of

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hours. I wouldn't talk to him. I was still angry about what had happened on the terrace."

"I'm sorry, Betsy. Your young man was pretty offensive."

"I know. He can be. But he didn't kill grandfather. I—I was in Bubba's arms when the shots were fired."

"He came back here in spite of what had happened?"

"No. I brought him here, Uncle John. About eight o'clock a friend called me from town and told me that Bubba was hitting all the bars, announcing what he was 'going to do' to grandfather. I went to find him, to try to calm him down."

"Your grandfather was home by then?"

"No. He'd been gone with Mr. Hoff longer than he expected. It was all right with me. I didn't have to explain to him where I was going."

"To find Bubba?"

She nodded. "It wasn't very hard to do. He'd been popping off all over town."

"And you brought him back here."

"It's my house, Uncle John."

"Was your grandfather here when you got back with your man?"

"No." She hesitated. "We have—had—a routine, grandfather and I. It was understood that the last one in would knock on the other's door, so we'd know everyone was where he, or she, was supposed to be. Grandfather would have done that, even though we were angry with each other about something. I didn't check with him when I got home with Bubba because his car wasn't in the garage."

"Mrs. Greer told the police that Martin came home a little after midnight. You hear him, too?"

Color flushed her cheeks. "I—I was—involved."

"Martin didn't knock on your door to let you know he was home? Your usual routine?"

"If there was someone with him—and there must have been, mustn't there?—he'd have waited till he was alone, till the house was closed up for the night."

"But later you heard the shots?"

She nodded.

"And Bubba was with you, he hadn't left you?"

"We were together when the shots sounded."

"And you—?"

"I left Bubba, pulled on a robe, and ran downstairs." Her voice shook. "I—I found grandfather—lying there—in all that blood! I—I

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called for an ambulance. Then Mrs. Greer appeared and she called the troopers."

"And Bubba?"

"He—he was gone."

"My hero!" Jericho said.

"He knew what would happen if he was found there, after all the threatening he'd been doing all over town."

"So he just left you to hold the bag for him?"

"He did the only thing he could do," Betsy said stubbornly. "He knew he mustn't be found here. Unfortunately, Mrs. Greer saw him leaving."

After a few moments silence Jericho changed the subject. "Martin told you he was going to the Gallery with Peter Hoff to see the van Gogh. He expected to be gone a couple of hours. He was actually gone more than seven. Can you account for that?"

"No. But the night watchman at the Gallery would know when he left there. Maybe he and Mr. Hoff had dinner somewhere, then had a few drinks afterwards to celebrate what was supposed to happen today."

"Maybe," Jericho said.

Jericho didn't have to go far to locate Peter Hoff. When he left Betsy he found the art expert out in the entrance hall talking with Captain Southworth. There was nothing to laugh at to make the round little man's stomach jiggle. He was clutching a briefcase as though it contained the million-and-a-half-plus that Willis Harmon had paid for the van Gogh.

"What a ghastly tragedy!" Hoff said. "To think you had that monster in your hands yesterday afternoon and could have put an end to him then and there. Poor Martin! Poor, good, kind Martin!"

"Mr. Jericho isn't so sure we have the right monster," Captain Southworth said.

"But Klint was seen leaving here! He'd been threatening Martin all evening!"

"Incidentally," Jericho said, "where did you and Martin spend the evening? He left here with you at five in the afternoon, telling Betsy he'd be gone for a couple of hours. He didn't get home till after midnight, which adds up to more than seven hours. He didn't let Betsy know when he did come home, which suggests to her that someone was with him. Was it you, Hoff?"

"Good heavens, no," Hoff said. "I went to the Harmon Gallery

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with Martin about five, as you say. The van Gogh arrived with its armed guard shortly after we got there. It was uncrated and Martin saw it for the first time. He was thrilled with it."

"Worth the price you persuaded Mr. Harmon to pay for it?"

"It may have been a bargain at that price. The painting is a masterwork."

"And then you and Martin parted. When?"

"I walked from the Gallery to the Harmon house where I'm staying. I didn't pay much attention to time. It was dark."

"Daylight Saving," Jericho said. "Not dark till 8:30. You were being thrilled by the van Gogh for three hours?"

"Wait till you see it," Hoff said.

Jericho turned to Southworth. "Where did Martin go after Hoff left him?" he asked. "He hadn't had dinner here. He can't have gone anywhere in this town or its surrounding places without being recognized. So he went somewhere, picked someone up, and brought that person home with him. That someone just may be the one you want, Captain. Shouldn't be too hard to trace, should it?"

"I'll take a swing at it," Southworth said, and left Jericho alone with Hoff.

"Did Martin tell you where he might be going when you left him?" Jericho asked.

"No. He was still there in the Gallery, still enjoying the van Gogh."

"And where did you have supper, Hoff?"

"Supper?"

"Or dinner—the last meal of the day."

"I—I guess I didn't bother with food."

"Someone saw you when you arrived back at the Harmon place?"

"No, the family was all out at a party somewhere, I think. I didn't happen to see any servants. I went straight to my room."

"So you can't produce a witness who saw you at Harmon's place."

"No. But why should I want to?"

"We all need to prove where we were just after midnight last night—all Martin's friends and acquaintances," Jericho said.

"But I've told you—"

"I think you told me a lie, Hoff," Jericho said. "Just as your story about finding the van Gogh is a lie. I'm a slow take, buster, but your little fairy tale began to crumble after a while. Painted in *The Starry Night* period, you told us, and Martin pointed out that painting was done in the last active year of van Gogh's life. But there was no

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quarrel with brother Theo in the late years, as is fully documented by their correspondence."

"Like *The Starry Night* period," Hoff said. "Not necessarily that exact chronological time. He would have had the same talent, the same concepts earlier. He must have—because there is this painting!"

"An unknown painting would have had to have been done before Theo began to support and help him," Jericho said. "That would be when Vincent van Gogh was nineteen or twenty—in 1872 or '73. Your 'art student,' you said, found an old crone—your description, Hoff—who remembered van Gogh staying with the Dutch barge-captain's family, giving the painting for his board and room. That old woman must have been a child at least ten years old to remember such a thing. That would make her about one hundred and twenty years old when your art student found her. Remarkable age, don't you think?"

"Perhaps she—"

"Perhaps she lied, as you lied, as your 'art student' lied. Martin must have put this all together before I did. It made him look more closely at the painting. What did he find? Paint that van Gogh couldn't possibly have used? Canvas manufactured after van Gogh was dead? How much did you offer Martin to keep your two-million-dollar ripoff of the Harmon Foundation a secret?"

"I've told you again and again—"

"I know you have," Jericho said. He took a quick step forward so that he was towering over the round little man. "You also told me yesterday that you'd hate to meet me in a dark alley. Well, Mr. Hoff, this is that dark alley." Jericho hit the man a stinging slap that knocked him sideways. "Martin detected the fake, didn't he?" Another slap that sent Hoff staggering the other way. "He brought you back to his house, didn't he, where you were to write out a confession, perhaps call Willis Harmon on the phone and tell him you'd swindled him out of a couple of million dollars?" A third staggering slap.

"No! No! No!" Hoff screamed. A trickle of blood ran from the corner of his mouth.

"You killed him, didn't you, to keep yourself in the clear?" Jericho moved in.

Hoff scrambled away and suddenly there was a gun in his shaking hand. Jericho made a sound that was like a delighted laugh. A quick side step, and a chopping blow. The gun went off as Jericho knocked it skittering across the hardwood floor. Hoff screamed again.

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"This is for Martin," Jericho said. He brought a crushing uppercut to Hoff's jaw that lifted the little man off his feet, back against the wall; then he slid down to a sitting position, his eyes glazed.

Southworth and another trooper came running in.

"What the hell's going on here?"

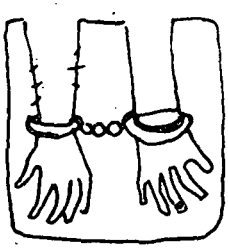
"Pick up that gun, Captain," Jericho said. "It's Hoff's and I haven't touched it. If ballistics doesn't show it's the gun that killed Martin Fair I'm due for a stretch in jail for criminal assault."

Southworth's trooper lifted the gun, using a pencil slipped through the trigger guard.

"Martin discovered Hoff had pulled a fraud amounting to a couple of million dollars. They spent the whole evening together, seven hours, then Martin brought him back here to write out a confession. When Hoff realized he couldn't buy Martin's silence he killed him. Just get the gun to ballistics."

"Well, if it proves out—"

"It will prove out," Jericho said. "The van Gogh will also prove to be a clever forgery. Now, while you check, I'm going to tell Betsy that her young man may have some nasty habits but murder isn't one of them." He started for the door and turned back. "If ballistics doesn't prove me right, Captain, you'll know where to find me. I'm not going anywhere."



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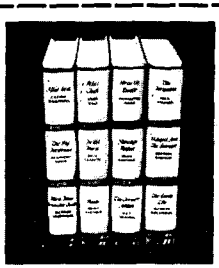

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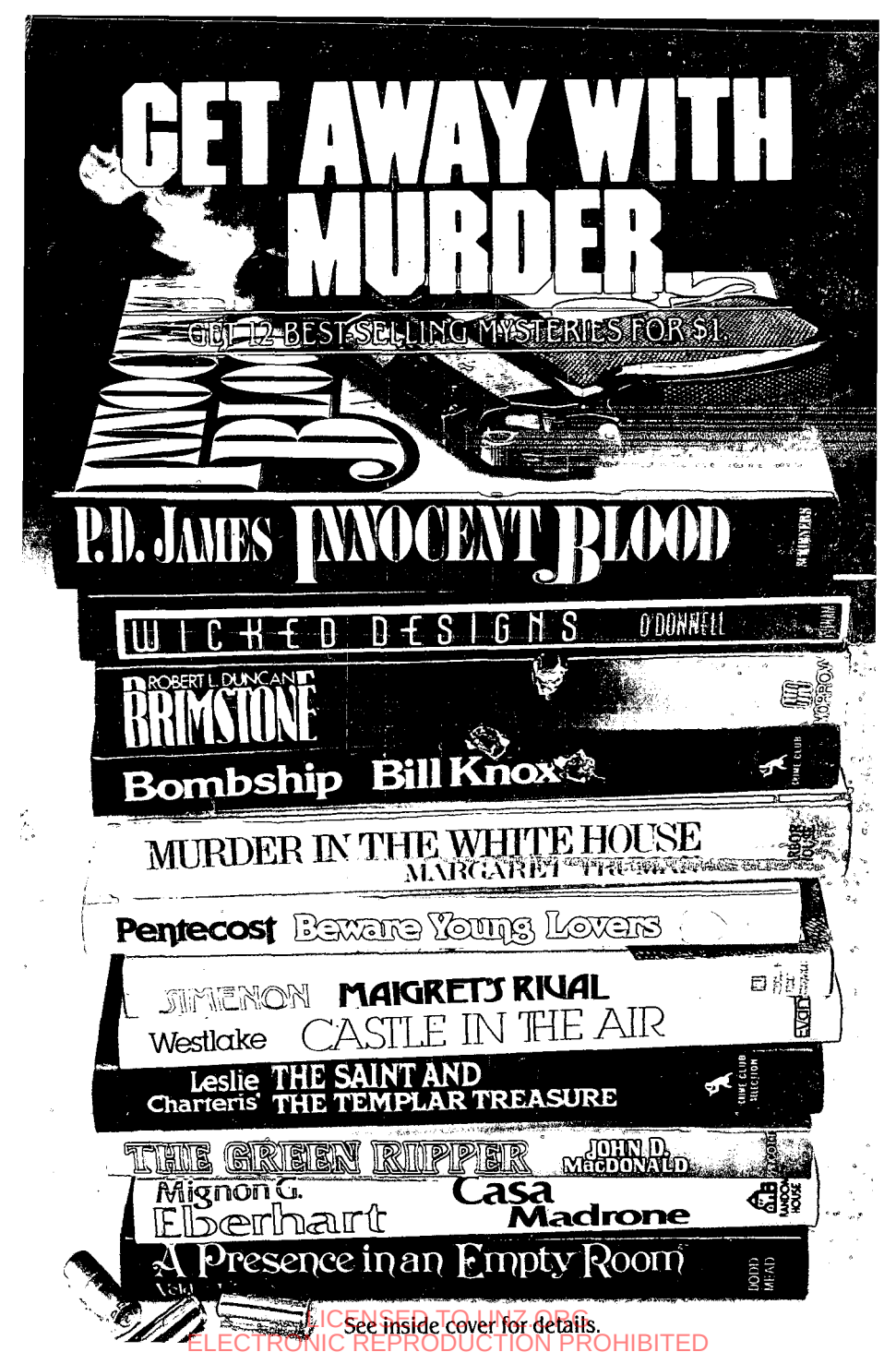
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